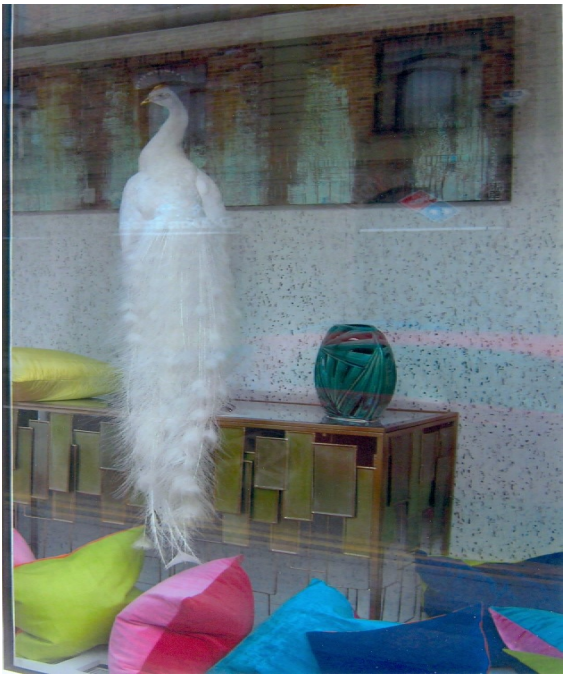
Flying Snake

Volume 5 Number 14 January 2019



An albino peacock in a shop window display, Macclesfield, Cheshire, UK © Richard Muirhead

Welsh flying snake story . Unknown Australian Spider . Stalin`s favourite poem in a dream? . Extinct Giant White British Dog . Frogs in Human Stomachs . Weird Goldfish behaviour . Pine Marten in Cheshire . More!

FLYING SNAKE SUBSCRIPTION AND GUIDELINES

Established by Richard Muirhead aka Dr Devo in 2011

Flying Snake appears about twice a year depending on the time I can find to research for items to include in it and whether or not I have recovered from dancing `The Poot` at Macclesfield`s clubs and pubs. Cover price is £3.99, £ 12 for 3 issues, please send a cheque for £3.99 etc to Richard Muirhead NOT Flying Snake, to:

112 High St

Macclesfield

SK11 7QQ

UK

I do not accept payments using non UK currencies, bank orders etc.

Co-Editors are Carl Marshall (U.K.) & Mike Hardcastle (Australia)

Back issues available at £3.99 each on request.

Pay Pal payments: richardmuirhead66@outlook.com

For further info on Flying Snake see https:// www.cosmicpolymath.com/blog

Contributions on all obscure aspects of cryptozoology, Forteana & folklore welcome at Editor`s say-so.

Please contact me for information about back issues and re-producing articles. Money orders and cheques not accepted from abroad, please use Google to convert your national currency to pounds sterling. Full colour pdfs of Flying Snake back issues and this issue can be sent to your e-mail inbox at £3.99 per copy.

Essays covering the occult, racism, sexism etc will never be considered. Photocopies of previous articles available at author`s and my discretion. COPYRIGHT PERMISSION HAS BEEN SOUGHT WHEREEVER POSSIBLE. ENJOY!

Weird Weekend North April 6th—7th 2019

Rixton-with-Glazebrook

Community Hall Cheshire

CONTENTS

Dr Devo`s Diary **5**

The Ropen of Papua New Guinea **Carl Marshall** **6 - 8**

Mrs Paddicks Mystery Mustelid the "kime" **Richard Muirhead** **9**

The Taco Massacre (1979), UFOs and Chupacabras **Javier Resines** **10 - 18**

A bat in broad daylight in Macclesfield **19 - 20** **Andy and Richard Muirhead**

A French Lake Monster **21 - 30** **Ulrich Magin**

The Fantastic Monster of Akali Lake **31 - 40**

David Weatherly

Black Squirrels in Hertfordshire **Richard George** **41 - 43**

Another Strange Spider **Mike and Terry Hardcastle and Rebecca Fechner** **44 - 45**

A Whale of a Tale **46 - 47** **Richard George**

Notes & Queries **48 - 71**

Letters **72 - 77** **Book Reviews** **78 - 79**

Dr Devo`s Diary

A warm welcome again to all readers of Flying Snake! I thought an explanation of why this magazine is called Flying Snake is long overdue (and I better make sure I haven`t already done so in a previous edition!) Essentially flying snakes ,by which I mean genuine cryptids and not the flying snakes which glide from tree to tree in certain parts of the Far East are my own particularly favourite type of cryptid. My first serious piece of cryptozoological research and writing was published in the Centre for Fortean Zoology Yearbook 1996 on the flying snake of Namibia and in a later Yearbook I talked about flying snakes in general. I decided to call this magazine Flying Snake as there is,to my mind, something quite bizarre and counter-intuitive about a snake flying, and also this title covers such a broad range of what this reptile actually does (I mean Chrysopelea or the gliding snake of South-east Asia and southernmost China,India and Sri Lanka.) and what it is *alleged* to do given reports of snakes in North America and elsewhere that appear to be able to hover,float,etc.

Moving on to developments in Flying Snake the magazine: The best thing that has happened since F.S. # 13 is that most issues are now digital thanks to anomaly researcher Isaac Koi and the AFU Shop in Sweden. They can be viewed using this web link: http://files.afu.se/Downloads/Magazines/United%20Kingdom/Flying%20Snake%20(Muirhead)/?fbclid=IwAR0B9_kCOX1bqnIaBWptTKJ2_nfVYf2Guw1RLf9RPqjxwnKn3OQTTA8KLbI

Finally I am still adding new members and contributing to Mystery Bird Reports Facebook group. Literally every day someone joins and as moderator, my word is law! But unlike a certain Mr D.Trump I am a benign dictator not a nasty one and the prospects of World War 3 breaking out in Devo Mansions is pretty darn low! Until next time, BOMBS AWAY!!!!

The Ropen of Papua New Guinea

Carl Marshall

The story of the Ropen is a long and convoluted one. Evidence for this alleged creature unfortunately comes from limited sources, in fact mostly from one man – Jonathan David Whitcomb. Jonathan Whitcomb is a young earth creationist, a person who believes the earth is 10,000 years old or younger, and that non avian dinosaurs and *pterosaurs* coexisted with man. Whitcomb travelled into Papua New Guinea in 2004 in an attempt to disprove evolution by investigating the mythology of the Papuan Ropen.

Evolutionary theory is stronger than Gravitational theory! I am certainly not suggesting researchers shouldn't attempt to disprove evolution (every scientific theory should be systematically questioned) but creationists will require far better evidence to disprove it than simply the discovery of the Ropen. Much in the same way that if the so called neo-dinosaur, mokele mbembe of the Congo, was discovered to be alive and well in central Africa, it would not in anyway disprove evolutionary theory, despite what creations would like to believe.

Evolution has been proven by most lines of evidence and has been repeatedly tested. It has successfully predicted future discoveries (it works and has been shown time and time again to do so) while creation has been proved by no evidence whatsoever and failed on every attempt to verify it.

You can believe in God and still except evolution as scientific fact, evolutionary theory does not explain where life came from (abiogenesis). Even if there is a God, evolution is still a fact.
Even though evolutionary theory is one of the strongest theories supported by countless evidences and is testable and verifiable simply by observing physical data such as the fossil record, embryonic development, transitional species, and to basically everything we generally know about biology.

The existence of post extinction *pterosaurs* would be more likely to strengthen evolution rather than disprove it.

Jonathan Whitcomb travelled into Papua New Guinea in 2004 and interviewing many of the islands native people. Natives spoke of eyewitness accounts of the so called creature. The Ropen is described by them as a massive nocturnal flying animal with a wing span of between ten and twenty three feet in length, and a very long tail approximately twenty five feet long. A tail of this length on a creature reported to be of these dimensions would create far too much drag for powered flight. *Pterosaurs* known to have possessed these elongated tails were typically of the smaller groups

The Ropen is also said to display extremely reduced limb size compared with known *pterosaurs* with virtually no feet or legs.

Its body seems to be a combination of several fossil forms from the large crest of the famous North American Cretaceous *Pterodon*; the extremely long tail with the diamond shaped and terminally located tip is reminisant of the German Jurassic *Rhamphorincus*. One eyewitness even identified the Ropen as the tiny fossil species *Sordes*. In general outline the Ropen resembles a frigate bird (*Frigata sp*.).

The Ropen seems to be basically the of the *pterosaurs*, with traits randomly taken from different, yet very well known species.
It is said to have dark leathery skin with no feathers or fur at all just like the out of date reconstructions of *pterosaurs* produced decades ago.

The Ropen is also said to be like a sort of flying vampire. It is said to dig up human graves in the night and to feast upon the corpses within. Oddly, the Ropen is also said to display bioluminescence, a characteristic not found in any fossil species. The vast majority of eyewitnesses do not describe a typical *pterosaur* at all, they simply mention distant nocturnal flashes of light in the sky.

Whitcomb suggests the Ropen is a living bioluminescent *pterosaur*. Yep, it's a glow in the dark *pterosaur*!!
He also believes it to be the fiery flying serpent from the bible –

Isaiah 14:29.

Many other proponents of the Ropen consider ancient relicts from Papua New Guinea to also provide evidence for its existence, and that the creature has been known by locals as a glowing demon of the night for centuries.

PhD zoologist and palaeontologist Dr. Darren Naish from the *University of Southampton* correctly suggests in his book *Hunting Monsters: Cryptozoology and the Reality Behind the Myths:*

"The possibility that pterosaurs might have survived beyond the end of the Cretaceous and into the modern day is not, in principle, impossible, but it does contradict the data we have, and it is not supported by anything other than vague and questionable eyewitness accounts".

So, it's by no means impossible that *pterosaurs* might have survived the mass extinction, and it certainly wouldn't disprove evolution if they did so, but we have absolutely no good evidence to prove this!

The evidence points towards *pterosaurs* becoming extinct during the KPG mass extinction approximately 66 million years ago. Along with about 70% of all other life on earth.

Unfortunately we need much more than simply blurry videos of distant lights, alleged grave disinterment, and vague eyewitness claims to prove the existence of the bioluminescent Ropen of Papua New Guinea.

Mrs Paddick`s Mystery Mustelid "The kime"

Richard Muirhead

In the late Summer of 2018 I came across a story whilst browsing through newspapers in the British Newspaper Archive of a Sussex folklore expert, writing under the pseudonym "Mrs Paddick" who told a story about a mystery weasel - like animal known as the "kane" or "cane" or "kime" which was supposed to be a type of weasel, also mentioned by the naturalist Gilbert White, in his `The Natural History of Selbourne` although I was unable to trace a mention of it there. The Sussex Record Office has an indexed copy of " Mrs Paddick`s" writings for her local newspaper of the time, which as of early December 2018 I have not yet got a copy of.

For copyright reasons I am not allowed to reproduce the exact stories here so I mention the relevant passages, as follows: `The West Sussex Gazette and South of England Advertiser` for September 26th 1940 mentions the kime and also the "high - pig" and Dr Devo knows not what a high-pig ever was (or is!) Apparently the kime was very fond of milk and similar to a stoat but without the black tip on its tail. (In one of those bizarre Fortean co-incidences I first saw this newspaper story on September 26th 2018 exactly 78 years to the day after it was first published!) On October 10th 1940 the same paper contained a letter from someone who recognised the word "kimes" or "cane" as referring to a weasel in the Meon Valley district of Hampshire. This is quite near that part of Hampshire where I noticed some rather strange looking taxidermy specimens in the window of a butcher`shop, a photo of a pale looking one appears on the cover of Jon Downes` book `The Smaller Mystery Carnivores of The Westcountry`.

The Taco Massacre (1979) UFOs and chupacabras.

Javier Resines

It was in 1979. Four years before, the chupacabra began to kill in Puerto Rico. Little by little, its death legend was gaining fame. While the phenomenon was spreading throughout Latin America, in a corner of Spain a series of strangely similar events developed in a parallel way and differently to what happened in regard to its American brother.

Remember that from cases of the Moca in 1975 to the resurgence of the matter in 1994, the American continent had remained almost calm in terms of attacks carried out by this singular bloodsucker. It's as if our protagonist had decided to try his luck in other lands and jumped the pond to land in, marvel at it ... the Canary Islands!

Without doubt in 1979 there was a wave of singular and violent attacks that had the island of Tenerife as its epicenter. Only four years after the events on the Caribbean island and long before its popularization by the international press, the chupacabra made an appearance on the soil of the Canary islands.

Taco, Tenerife, April 1979 The incidents began in the month of April of that year. The security manager of a construction materials factory located in Taco, Tenerife, found one morning - when he opened the doors of the company to start the day - that one of his German shepherd dogs was dead.

The animal appeared next to an old abandoned car, more than 20 meters from where it was usually tied and without its collar, which has been torn from the neck. When examining the corpse they noticed that it had two circular holes and was cauterized on one side where they had extracted some viscera and, apparently, all the blood. The dog showed no sign of fighting or having been poisoned. The workers also found no clue that can offer any explanation for what had happened. No traces, no blood around, ... nothing. And the dog seemed completely bloodless. A very clean attacker ... and very strange.

But far from being able to shelve the issue, only four days later the company's vigilance was faced with almost identical facts. Another of the dogs was dead. This time, the dog lay about thirty meters from his shed and had two perfectly round holes in its sides, about three centimeters in diameter.

Through them it could be seen that some internal organs had been removed, as well as all the blood in his body. On this occasion the collar was not found either. Both were found days later by police officers in an area close to the events. They still had remains of hair from their victims.

To make the case even more disturbing, according to the investigations carried out at the time, the two dogs attacked appeared soaked in water, although the ground around them was completely dry. Curiously, those nights it had not rained in the area either.

The newspaper El Día published the statements of different witnesses. They stated that no barking was heard during the attacks and that it seemed as if the dogs had been numbed with some narcotic product so that the perpetrator could act with absolute impunity.

Fig 1. Map of Canary Islands showing Taco

Fig 2. News in the newspapers of the time

Fig 3. Dead goats in Taco

Let us not forget, at this point, some American cases in which the testimonies refer to the possibility that the chupacabra uses some paralyzing gas to subdue its victims. Or that even the animal has telepathic powers with which to take control of the situation. Although consider these hypotheses , we leave them, at least, parked on the side of impossible possibilities (sic) just in case we have to consider them later.

New attacks. The police offer explanations

The wave of unexplained events of 1979 had only just begun. In mid - May, the Local Police of La Laguna received a new complaint about another strange attack. In Guamasa, a town located only 14 kilometers southeast of Taco, a pig had been found dead with terrible mutilation. Without viscera, without snout, without eyes and without a drop of blood on his body. As with the Taco dogs, in this attack there were no traces of blood in the place of aggression.

A few days later, on May 18, Muñoz Yéveres, head of the Press Office of the Local Police, gave a press conference in which he launched the official explanation that the authorities usually communicate in these circumstances, with the intention of reassuring the citizenship. Some citizens were beginning to feel some concern at such unusual events.

The hypothesis put forward by the spokesman, and with which it was intended to close all speculations on the death of the pig, was that the source of the incidents had to have been a ferret or a giant rat, but they were not too clear about it. The death of the dogs, on the other hand, was treated as an act of revenge committed by some villager with problems with the owners of the factory.

Obviously, these explanations did not leave anyone satisfied. The danger increased one more degree with the unsettling statements of Antonio Sierra, provincial delegate of Health, stating that *"we have really come to be anxious because it has no spontaneous character, but it is a clear sacrifice of dogs. It does not present sanitary aspects, but fetishists. "*

Meanwhile, the testimonies of attacks and sightings throughout the island multiplied. All those involved in this dark history, agents of public order, owners of animals and the curious in general provided the most orthodox explanations for these cases: satanic sects, feral dogs, the typical feline escaped from a zoo, pranksters with few scruples, ... All believed they were in possession of the truth.
But the idea that a rare animal was doing its thing on the island gained new impetus after a "*strange bug"* was sighted (as it was called) by schoolchildren in a Taco school. The descriptions provided by the children were somewhat confused and the only data that could be extracted from this whole matter was that the being in question was covered with dark hair. The thing that was also unclear

Fig 4. Benito The Surviving Dog

was the discovery of the lifeless body of a young man who had been found - apparently - with wounds similar to those that killed the animals. Nothing could be confirmed on this aspect because the police conservatism made it impossible to make progress in the investigations and the popular imagination perhaps wanted to see something sinister where there was only an accidental death without major strangeness.

Sucesos / 35

Tras la misteriosa muerte de dos perros guardianes

EL MIEDO RONDA TACO

- Los cuerpos presentan dos agujeros circulares, por los que se les extrajeron las vísceras.
- No se encontró ningún rastro de sangre al lado de los cuerpos.

Fig 5 The “attack” on Benito as reported in the newspapers

In October, the predator returned to action. On this new occasion, several goats appeared dead in a livestock farm, also in Taco, with the same characteristics as in previous occasions. The necropsy was carried out by the Regional Agrarian Laboratory, whose director, Joaquín Quillós, referred in his report to the necessary use of sophisticated technical instruments to carry out the "aggression". It was not the work of an animal ..

Lights in the sky, attacks on the ground

The police admitted the presence of lights in the sky in the area during the nights in which the killings took place, which raised all kinds of speculations and an unusual expectation among the followers of the UFO phenomenon. There was a new avenue of investigation and another hypothesis to throw to the sack of possibilities: the chupacabras were crew of extraterrestrial ships or - as some pointed - rather mascots of the Martians, biological robots at their service.

The matter reached unsuspected levels of excitement upon the occurrence of a new case that in addition coincided with the observation of an unidentified flying object on Taco, referred to by several independent witnesses to each other. On this occasion the victim was another dog, which is curious because - in many of the most unique cases featuring the Canarian version of the chupacabra - the dogs become their center of attention. This feature does not occur in other latitudes, where farm animals are their almost exclusive target, not being so common were attacks on guard dogs that tended to appear simply numb or frightened.

What makes this new case with the dog unique is that the animal did not lose its life, becoming one of the few survivors worldwide that could tell (if he could talk, of course) that it had come out alive from the attack of one of these beings.

Benito, as that was the name of the victim, appeared almost bled dry and with three marks on his side. It was appreciated that, through one of these holes, they had begun to extract the viscera of the animal, but something or someone prevented them from achieving their purpose. Maybe the presence of some human made the beast flee? We will never know.

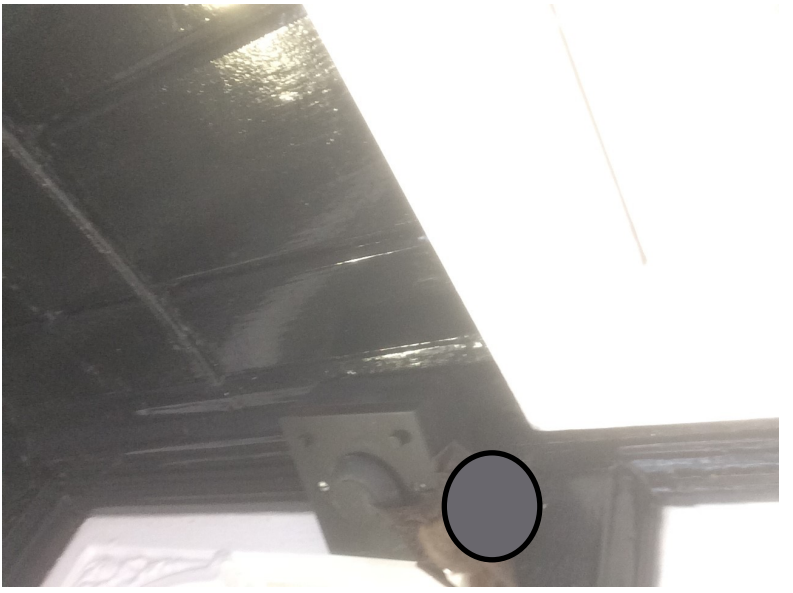
The attacks continued filling pages of newspapers and coffee gatherings during the following months, finding several dead animals that had as characteristic features the extraction of internal organs and the absence of blood in their bodies. The final number of victims of this (or these) chupacabras from Tenerife was - finally - two dogs, a pig, a dozen rabbits, some ducks, several cats and more than fifteen goats. And one wounded, Benito.

Obviously, some explainable deaths were also added to this long list of victims, increasing the legend of the Taco beast to the delight of the researchers of the subject and undisguised fear of the residents of this neighborhood and surroundings. The Canary archipelago as on so many other occasions- does not stop fascinating us with its stories wrapped in mystery. And, almost forty years later, the wave of attack suffered by the island of Tenerife continues. without possible explanation ...

A bat in broad daylight in Macclesfield

Richard Muirhead and Andy

In mid September 2018 I was chatting to a busker in Macclesfield aged I guess in his mid 20s called Andy and somehow we got onto the subject of strange animal stories and as a result of this he told me about how that same



© **Andy**

week he had seen a small brown bat about the size of a teenager`s fist fly from the brick work above a jeweller`s shop opposite to where he was siting on the ground with his guitar and flit around in the air above Chestergate where all this was taking place. Perhaps it had been disturbed? Seeing as I have never seen a bat in the middle of the afternoon I thought I`d include it in this issue of Flying Snake. Above photo taken by Andy and copy-right belongs to him, reproduced here with his permission.

This is what Carl Marshall had to say about the bat in an e-mail to me on September 14th 2018:

"It looks like a Common Pipistrelle *Pipistrellus pipistrellus* to me, but its difficult to be certain considering the limitations of the photograph. There a four species of pipistrelle bat living in the UK and they are all very similar; there is the already mentioned Common Pipistrelle *P. pipistrellus*, the Soprano Pipistrelle *P. pygmaeus* (only formally separated from *P. pipistrellus* in 1999 based of there different frequency echolocation calls,) Nathusius's Pipistrelle *P. nathusii* (of which we know very little about its zoogeography as its often mistaken for *P. pipistrellus* and/or *P. pygmaeus*), and the vagrant Kuhl's Pipistrelle *P. kuhlii* from southern Europe.

I think its most likely that this pipistrelle bat had been disturbed, either by a human or an animal, and flew out in blind panic (maybe being hunted by a cat). These kind of bats (crevice dwelling species) prefer crepuscular conditions, so prefer low light as opposed to complete darkness. Going by the photographs alone, it looks like the bat is active indoors (in low light) which is not such an unusual occurrence.

It is important nobody touches this bat if its seen again, as they are protected in Britain, and can only be legally handled by professional wildlife rehabilitators.

Your friend Carl

A French Lake Monster

Ulrich Magin

Continental creatures

In December 1933, the sightings of the Loch Ness monster began to make headlines all over the world. And suddenly, people started to observe sea-serpents and lake monsters almost everywhere, or recalled older traditions of their own. Even in continental Europe, not known for observations of aquatic cryptids today, witnesses reported curious encounters.

The first report came from Lake Maggiore (where monsters are still reported today, though rarely), and from Tuscany in Italy:

'Monsters are fashionable. Italy has now discovered a hornless bull as big as an elephant lurking in the hills of Tuscany, and a snorting, fire-spitting dragon has been seen ploughing through the blue waters of Lake Maggiore.' (1)

Lake Maggiore is half in Switzerland, and this country also provided the next monster sighting, which was widely reported:

'Switzerland has River Monster.

GENEVA, June 19 (AP) – Switzerland now boasts a terrifying river monster, one which would put the famous resident of Loch Ness into the shade.

Anglers, who claim to have seen it disporting in the River Doubs said it had an oval-shaped body, long neck, small head, blue back and yellow stomach. It travels with an undulating motion, they said.

The fishermen indignantly denied they were the victims of hallucinations and are keeping a night and day watch for the monster.' (2)

The beast of Lake Camon

The Doubs flows towards France and runs into the Saône. Whether these monsters closing in on France encouraged the French to report their own version, or whether it would have happened anyway – however, in September 1934, France had her first lake monster. As far I am aware, it has never before been mentioned in a cryptozoological book, and suddenly surfaced for the first – and last – time in Lac Camon halfway between the Atlantic coast and the Mediterranean at the foothills of the Pyrenees. It did so at least in American newspapers.

'Phosphorescent-Eyed Monster" Is Hunted By Hundreds In France. Saint Gaudens, France, Sept 3. (AP) – The ancient wolf lore of this region within the shadow of the once savage Pyrenees was called into play Sunday to track down a "monster with phosphorescent eyes" reported sighted near here.

Despite storms sweeping the district hundreds of hunters and sightseers, headed by the St. Gaudens district "wolf lieutenant," spent the week-end exploring Lake Camon in an effort to find the beast. The lake long has been regarded by geologists as the last remaining trace of a lost inland sea of ancient times.

Late today they had found no trace of it, but M. F. Narud, the hunter who reported its appearance, insisted he saw the creature last Friday suddenly appear from among reeds bordering the marshy section of the lake.

Narud described the monster as prehistoric in appearance. Its body is 25 feet long and five feet thick. It was covered with large scales, he said, and to add to its frightfulness, had curious shining eyes. "Wolf Lieutenant" Moga, his office handed down from years past when every district had its "wolf lieutenant" to protect it from predatory animals, promptly turned from his duties as fox hunter to organize the search for the beast. Although there are only forty wolves in the whole country now, and these are protected in forest preserves, there are 1,100 Frenchmen who will hold the title of wolf lieutenant. Charlemagne, in 813, granted the wolf hunters exemption from military service,

a share of the emperor's grain supply, and other privileges. Now the job is a costly one for the holder.

The wolf lieutenant not only is expected to keep a large pack of hounds at his own expense, but also must pay a tax and bear the costs of elaborate hunts, in which he wears a uniform that includes a double-breasted horizon blue jacket and a gold-braided cup.' (3)

In a slightly different wording, essentially the same new story was also covered by other papers:

'Frenchmen Spend Week-end Seeking 'Scaly Monster'. SAINT GAUDENS, France, Sept. 4 — Hundreds of Frenchmen lost sleep and got wet in a vain hunt over the week-end for "the scaly monster of Lake Camon."

A violent storm swept over the Tartarins district as hunters, ready for anything, splashed about the reed-grown borders of the lake looking for a creature which had been described to them as a "pre-historic beast with phosphorescent eyes."

Nothing has come of the hunt up to now, but the determination of the hunters, amateur scientists and the curious grew as M. F. Narud, the man who reported seeing the beast, stuck to his original story and enlarged on aspects of the beast.

It was thick and about 25 feet long, he said. It moved cumbersomely and an eerie light shone from its eyes, he stated. Its body, he believed, was covered with scales. In the popular mind credence was given to the possibility that a prehistoric beast had survived to these times when geologists came forward with theories that Lake Camon is a remnant of an ancient sea.' (4) From these verbose, but imprecise newspaper stories it is difficult to define just who saw what, and when! Even additional new coverage does not help very much. I hope and suspect that French news reports, unavailable to me at the time of writing, will help to define the finer points of this sensational event. Be that as it may, the story continued in the American papers.

‘Hunters Seeking 25-foot Dragon. Creature Reported at Lake Camon France, Also Has Searchlight Eyes.`

(Associated Press Cable.) Saint Gaudens, France, September 3. – The dragon of Lake Camon which opened the local hunting season with a bang, apparently had been scared off today by the bangs of shotguns fired after in offensive rabbits and partridges.

The small game-hunters who flocked into the region (and quartered themselves in the local inns) were amazed by their inability to catch a glimpse of the beast reported by M. F. Narud, for the local hunter and originator of the report described his find as 25 feet long and possesses of searchlight eyes.

Such a quadruped, it was generally admitted, would have difficulties in hiding himself in a sufficiently camouflaged lair to avoid the intrepid search of the hundreds of hunters armed with fowling pieces.

Not all the local inhabitants were enthusiastic about their dragon, for Southern France long has been sensitive over the fact Alphonse Daudet in his “prodigious adventures of Tartarin de Tarascon” made the remarkable Tartarin a native of their region.

There was the slightly foolish thought that this search for a dragon in rabbit country was not without its parallel in Tartarin de Tarascon’s adventures Daudet has his hero hunting big game in Africa, fire at a jack-rabbit and kill a blind lion.

For two days this search for the dragon has gone on across the marshy ground around the lake. Tonight the hunters shrugged their shoulders and went with resignation to the prosaic task of filling their cooking pots with small game.’ (5)

And that was it. The monster received a further short notice in a syndicated piece from 1947, comparing the new fad of flying saucer to the more traditional of the lake monster, recalling sightings of lake creatures that had been “seen swimming at Loch Ness, Scotland, Lake Como, Italy, Swan Lake, Mich., Lake Camon, France, and in the Atlantic Ocean two miles from Flatbush ...” (6)

A giant lizard

However, a scaly monster once again appeared in the general region five years later, in 1939. This happened roughly 40 kilometres west of Saint Gaudens, in the Garonne Valley, and in this summer made headlines in many parts of the world.

The first to mention it was the London "Times" whose correspond reported "A monster in Bigorre" (7):

Two women picking flowers in the dark forest near the village of Ossun, close to Tarbes, encountered a reptile 1,8 m tall with the head of a lizard. They ran to the village, where they seeked assistance. The villagers formed a posse to kill the monster. Then, additional observations were reported in the two weeks following the initial encounter. A man met with a "monstrous reptile" 1.7 m long, with four feet and a large and round body similar to that of a dog. It moved, like the tatzelwurm of the Alps, in several leaps.

The first news report appeared in May, and it took them until August to reach America:

'See Strange Monster, Women Report.

Paris, Aug. 12 – A distant relative of the Loch Ness monster is spreading fear in the Pyrenees.

Several inhabitants of the village of Ossun, near Tarbes, in Bigorre, report having seen an animal some 6 feet tall with a head of a saurian, lurking in a murky wood. Two women, while collecting lilies-of-the-valley, were reported to have seen an unusual animal. Then ran back to the village calling for help.' (8)This sighting, or series of sighting, was not the first monster at the place, though. As a German newspaper, the *Neue Mannheimer Zeitung*, tells us, as early as 15 February 1893, a country parson had met with a monstrous lizard. He reported his sighting to the police, who noted in a report that "the strange animal was 1.5 m long, including the head and tail. Its colour was green; it had a scaly skin, recalled a lizard, and had, at both sides of the throat, something like a fat pig." The parson fled when the monster opened its big mouth.

Also, on 25 May 1893 a farmer was eating below a giant oak when a monstrous serpent, coiled around a branch, approached him. He also ran away as fast as he could. (9)

Perhaps the monster of Lake Camon was a tatzelwurm which had ventured into the swamps. Or are these incidents unrelated? As with almost all in this sketchy case, it is difficult to know just what to think of all this.

Saint-Gaudens – where is the monster's lake?

Not only the lake monster, the whole Lake Camon is enigmatic. There appear to several Lac Camons in France, but none near Saint-Gaudens, although a lake in a larger distance in the Pyrenees seems to bear the name. A google earth search reveals several gravel pits near Saint-Gaudens, but no large body of water. A road running west from the town to the river is marked "Camon" on the map, however, if there was a swamp or lake in the 1930s, it does no longer exist.

Saint-Gaudens (in Occitan, Sent Gaudenç) is a French provincial town of 11,000 inhabitants at the foothills of the Pyrenees in the département Haute-Garonne in the region Midi-Pyrénées. The Garonne flows through the town and perhaps once formed swamps called Lac Camon. The whole affair is quite contradictory:

- Although Lac Camon is on no maps, searching for it the geographical index iTouchMap simply points an arrow at Saint-Gaudens. (10)

- My search turned up a scientific paper on a "Summary of Calculations for Reservoirs in Lake Camon Lake Period", but I have been unable to trace it (11), possibly Lake Camon here means a postglacial lake (like Lake Agassiz in America, the "internal sea" the newspapers referred to).

In a 19th century book the toponym "lac Camon" is treated as a synonym for a certain "lac d'Orredon" (12) – today, a Lac d'Orredon or Lac d'Orédon is situated about 30 kilometres southwest of Saint-Gaudens in a height of 1849 metres above sea, on a Pyrenean peak bordering on Catalonia. It is a reservoir with a surface of 0.46 km².

Google Earth, when you enter that name, indicates a lake, but it has a different name on the map!

Therefore, it is possible that Lac d'Orédon is a collective name for a group of lakes, and possibly there was a Lac Camon near Saint-Gaudens in 1934 which no longer exists.

Did it come from the sea?

As we find no sighting of a lake monster at Lac Camon prior to 1934, and none later, perhaps this creature – if real – was a visitor, and not a resident of the region? The Garonne flows into the Atlantic Ocean in a mighty estuary, the so-called Gironde. And in this large bay, we encounter several cases of strandings of sea-serpents.

The first stranding of a sea monster which is so fragmentary and contradictory described that it might have been anything, from a decomposed basking shark (the "elephant shark") to a dead seal, happened in 1936:

'Dead Sea Monster Puzzles Fishermen. Bordeaux, France, Dec. 31 (AP) – An "elephant headed" monster of the sea puzzled fishermen of the little village of Soulac today.

The strange carcass was reported thrown up on the beach near the mouth of the Gironde River yesterday.

Villagers described it as 18 feet long and 15 feet in girth. Three-foot fins emerged from the back of the head, which was compared to that of an elephant which had lost its trunk.

Huge teeth lined the long jaw of the creature, which the fishermen said seemed to belong to an order of marine mammals.

They thought most likely it had been wounded in the Arctic seas and then drifted to the coast of France.' (13)

An almost similar story reaches us in 1960:

‘Blue Sea Monster Is Washed Ashore. BORDEAUX France (Reuters) – An unidentified blue-grey “sea-monster” about 13 feet wide and weighing several tons has been washed up on Cape Ferrat beach, in the Bay of Biskay.

Resembling a sea elephant, the monster has huge ears protruding from a flat head, webbed feet about 6½ feet long and thick black hair growing from its bulging sides.’ (14)

A few days later, it was “explained”:

‘Sea Elephant Was “Monster”. BORDEAUX, France (Reuters) – The remains of a “sea monster” discovered on a beach near here last Friday have been tentatively identified as a sea elephant, the marine biological station said today. Examination of the 13-foot-long, 10-foot-wide blue-grey hairy mass strongly indicated it was a sea elephant from the northern regions.’ (15)

Perhaps, in the French zoological journals, there are analyses and correct identifications of the 1936 and 1960 beasts. Finally, we have the stranding of 16 January 1999 at Biscarosse:

‘Bizarre Marine Mammal Found on a Beach in France. The corpse of an extremely rare marine mammal, with a whale corpse and a dolphin head, was found on 16th on a beach at Biscarosse (south-west) according to the Groupe d'études de la faune marine atlantique (GEFMA), This mammal of the zhitiidés family is an *Europaeus* or a *Mesoplodon bidens* but according to the teeth it is likely an Europaeus declared to France Press Associated Alexandre Dewez, president of the GEFMA of Capbreton (South-West). The *Europaeus* is a very rare specimen which was observed only once in France in 1850 he precised. *Mesoplodons bidens* specimens are relatively more common, because one specimen is found each 4 years on the beaches of France.’ (16) Obviously, the scaly beast of Saint-Gaudens cannot be related to these isolated finds of sea-creatures. There appears to be no tradition, in the Gironde, of a resident monster such as the New England Sea Serpent or Cornwall’s (mainly invented) Morgawr. None of these finds will help us to identify the strange tatzelwurm which, in

1934, played lake monster in a swamp in the Pyrenees – not even the local traditions about mermaids (a snake-like Melusine in the Church of Puce, Gironde) (17). There is a web-site, in French, about sightings of giant snakes in the Gironde which may contain more information, either on land or sea monster, but my French is not sufficient enough. (18)

Conclusion

Was the Lac Camon monster an invention? A log mistaken for a monster? A local version of the tatzelwurm which entered a swamp? Where is Lac Camon anyway? And: Is this whole affair in the terrain of the folklorist or that of the cryptozoologist?

I regret I speak no French and have had no access to French sources, be they books or newspapers, about this affair. But this sketch of the French lake monster might inspire readers to fill out the blanks in the narrative that I, of necessity, have left.

Notes

1. *Evening Post* 16 April 1934, p. 5

2. *The Telegraph*, Nashua, N.H. 19 June 1934, p. 2; *Spokane Daily Chronicle* 19 June 1934, p. 14; *Los Angeles Times* 20 June 1934)

3. *Gettysburg Times* 3 September 1934, p. 5; *The Sun*, Baltimore, 3 and 4 September 1934; *New York Times* 3 September 1934)

4. *San Jose News*, *Evening Independent* (p. 5), *Hartford Courant*, all 4 September 1934

5. *Montreal Gazette*, *Chicago Tribune*, both 4 September 1934

6. Flying Disk? That's Simple. *Youngstown Vindicator* 8 July 1947

7. *The Times* 1 May 1939, see also *Neue Mannheimer Zeitung* 10 May 1939. 8. *Sunday Morning Star* (Wilmington, Delaware) 6 August 1939, p. 1

9. = Michel Meurger: *Dragons*, p. 243; Pursuit 73, p. 19. There are conflicting dates for these sightings, such as 15 October 1892, 15 February 1892 or 1893, 15 March and 25 May 1893.

10. http://itouchmap.com/?p=lac+camon%2C+france&submit=+Go+&t=l&r=b

11. National Geographic Society (ed.): National Geographic Research. vol 5, 1989, p. 157

12. Henri Béraldi: *Cent ans aux Pyrénées*. impr. L. Danel, 1898, p. 160

13. *Reading Eagle*; *Spokane Spokesman-Review*, *Chicago Tribune*, all 31 December 1936

14. Reuters in (Regina) *Leader-Post* 11 January 1960, p. 10; *Miami News* 11 January 1960; UPI, in similar wording, in *The Singapore Free Press*, 9 January 1960, p. 3; *Hartford Courant* 10 January 1960, p. 26A

15. *Ottawa Citizen* 13 January 1960, Saskatoon *Star-Phoenix* 14 January 1960, p. 4

16. *Le Soleil*, Quebec, 22 January 1999, quoted after http://theshadowlands.net/serpent2.htm:

17. *Babylonian Influence on the Bible*, at: www.archive.org/.../babylonianinflu00palmgoog_djvu.txt -

18. *Un serpent monstruux en Gironde* ? at: http://serpentsdefrance.free.fr/forum/viewtopic.php?f=2&t=1326

The Fantastic Monster of Alkali Lake

David Weatherly

"Its head was all I saw, and it was as big as a wash tub."

So stated a witness describing the legendary water monster that reportedly lived in Alkali Lake near Hay Springs, Nebraska in the early 1900s.

The sightings purportedly began in the 1920s and a flurry of articles appeared first in Nebraska, and eventually, in newspapers around the world, detailing encounters with the creature.

The monster was described as something resembling an alligator with a large horn between its eyes. It had four legs, though some said there were only two (in the front) and the back were flippers. The creature's body was serpentine and its length somewhere between 10 to 100 feet. Most notable was the monster's horrible and unforgettable stench. But was the creature real or a pure fabrication?

The landlocked State of Nebraska isn't a likely candidate for a water monster. It lies in the Great Plains region of the United States and is largely composed of gently rolling hills and prairies. Agriculture plays a major role in Nebraska and the state produces large quantities of corn and soybeans.

Admitted as a state in 1867, Nebraska has a current population of almost two million people, spread over an area of 77,358 square miles. In the 1920s, Nebraska's largest cities saw steady growth, and its rural communities continued to build around the state's abundant farms.

1921 edition:

"Hay Springs Aroused Over Discovery of a Deep-Sea

In the state's northwestern region, the small town of Hay Springs came alive with a fantastic tale of something strange in a nearby body of water. Originally, the first reports of the monster made it sound like something from the depths of the ocean, specifically, an octopus. According to news sources, there was quite a furor over reports of the creature. As the *Alliance Herald* of Alliance, Nebraska reported in its August 9, 1921 edition:

"Hay Springs Aroused Over Discovery of a Deep-Sea Monster"

"…lake now said to be the home of an octopus or something that has the appearance of one."

Whatever the beast was, it didn't stay in the form of a cephalopod for very long. Descriptions of the creature changed in short order. Follow-up stories portrayed a very different beast, not one with tentacles. In fact, there were constant contradictions in details as the stories rolled in.

The *Hay Springs News* pointed out that this was due to the wide range of accounts given by witnesses. As the *News* stated, the monster had been "…seen three or four different times and by three or four different parties and is described in various forms."

Various forms indeed. An article from the *Alliance Herald* the following week bore the headline: "Thinks Monster At Hay Springs May Be A Whale"The August 16 story reported that a witness saw a creature that "spouted water twenty feet." Apparently, at this point, the creature was vaguely whale shaped and had a blowhole. Just as the whale tale was making the rounds, *The Hemingford Ledger* claimed to have located a witness, one Arthur Johanson. According to the *Ledger* story, when reporters asked Johanson how large the creature was, he responded: "…It must be about 10 feet long and 2 or 3 feet broad. It was of a " dark greyish color and apparently

"very active." Speculation was that a gray whale from the North Pacific had somehow become stranded in a lake in the middle of the United States. A whale in a Nebraska lake? As farfetched as it sounded, the suggestion would come back around several times over the next couple of years.

Not to be outdone with tales of out of place whales, *The Lincoln Star* upped the ante on eye catching headlines in their September 17, 1921 edition when they proclaimed:

"Say Big Monster May Be Mermaid"

No doubt the story caught the eye of fishermen in the region and caused a new wave of interest in a potential mystery creature in the lake. The article noted that tales of a mermaid had not slipped the attention of the local farmer's wives. As the *Star* reported:

"Great excitement prevails among the female population of this vicinity over the report that the peculiar animal is a mermaid and it is said that many of the wives of this community have forbidden their husband to hunt ducks on this lake."

More reports followed through the fall and into the following year. By August 1922, the focus turned to plans to capture the elusive cryptid. *The Lincoln Star* ran a story on August 24 with the banner:"To Attempt to Capture Monster in Alkali Lake" The news item recounted plans coming out of Hay Springs. Apparently, locals wanted to solve the mystery and figure out once and for all what the creature was. Maybe some of the farmers were hoping for the mermaid. The idea was to capture rather than kill the monster. To do this, the plan was to create a seine large enough to drag the lake bottom. As the *Star* reported: "A large wire drag is being prepared for the purpose of dragging the lake in an effort to capture the mysterious aquatic inhabitant of the lake. Large fossil beds in this vicinity which show that western Nebraska at one time was the home of pre

"That such a monster exists is not doubted in this vicinity and recent reports added to those of last year when the monster first made its appearance have stirred the people to action."

- historic animals of almost every geological age, lead some to believe the possibly the sea monster that inhabits the lake south of here is some age-old animal that was left behind in the process of evolution."

The same article reiterated the fact idea that people in the region firmly believed in the existence of the monster:

"That such a monster exists is not doubted in this vicinity and recent reports added to those of last year when the monster first made its appearance have stirred the people to action."

Talks of a plan to capture the water monster went on for months and it was still being discussed in the spring of 1923. Reportedly, the capture attempt was on and planned for the summer. Newspapers tried to build excitement running stories suggesting the mystery of the lake monster would soon be solved and a fantastic creature captured for all to see.

In fact, the idea of catching a monster seemed to hold as much interest as actual sightings of the creature. Still, the lake wasn't drug. An original date of June 23 came and went, and no capture attempt was made though tales of the monster didn't go away.

The Nebraska State Journal reported a new encounter in its July 14, 1923 edition. This one included a new set of witnesses, though only two were identified by name. According to the paper: "George Locke of Central City, Neb., Bob Cook of Lakeside, Neb., And two Texas men started to drive overland from Lakeside to Hay Springs. Darkness overtook the quartet and it was decided to stop on the spot as the car had also been stalled in the mire. About 2 o'clock in the morning, Locke declared he was awakened by a commotion in the waters. Looking out from the car, he declares, he saw a fierce and fiery monster, with head and horns sticking clear above the surface of Locke began shouting and roused his companions. The four men successfully

freed their vehicle from the muddy spot and got underway before the creature could reach them. Even their escape was hazardous, and the car was enveloped by a "…dense fog coming from the creature's nostrils."

Nevertheless, they made it into town safely and reported their frightening encounter.

A few days later, the plan to drag the lake bottom was in the news again, but this time, a wrench was thrown into the scheme. Local land owners were protesting the idea and as a result, no permit was issued to allow the dragging of the lake. Alternative plans started making the rounds. One article suggested hiring a "whaling outfit" to come in and take the creature but nothing came to fruition.

Even without an attempt to capture it, 1923 was a big year for the Alkali Lake monster. It was the year the creature suddenly hit the world stage. It began when the *Omaha World-Herald* ran a story about the beast. Recounting a sighting by one J.A. Johnson. Johnson claimed that he and his friends saw a water monster "forty feet long, dull gray/brown in color with a horn-like object between its eyes and nostrils."

Johnson and his friends claimed the thing looked like an alligator, only much larger and heavier. The men also reported the beast let out a 'dreadful roar' and thrashed its tail about before diving into the lake and vanishing.

Once the story ran, it was picked up by *The London Times.* The paper reprinted the account and added some commentary that included the following passage: "By far the most vivid picture of the actions and features of a medieval monster which for three years has been terrifying the natives of the vicinity of Alkali Lake near the small town of Hay Springs, Nebraska, U.S.A., was received by our Omaha, Nebraska correspondent today."

As 1923 marched forward, there were more stories, more purported plans to capture the creature and more tall tales.

Purportedly Game Wardens traveled to the lake to survey the area and devise a plan to do something about the monster. But best laid plans came to a halt on August 5 when *The Nebraska State Journal* ran a short article that took the wind out of the Alkali beast:

"Monster is a Fabrication"

"Latest Story of Big Alkali Lake Dragon Going the Rounds"

"Hay Springs, Neb., Aug 4—The latest report about the "monster" in Big Alkali lake is that the entire story is the fabrication of people who are endeavoring to draw tourists, and that the "monster" is in reality an inflated bag resembling a cow. Numerous stories are going the rounds, although some natives still insist that something big and alive exists in the lake."

The story signaled a sudden end to news accounts of the lake monster and its three-year run was over. Sort of. Real or not, the people of Hay Springs never let the monster go completely. Perhaps it was the outlandish nature of the printed accounts, perhaps it was the rich folklore of the tale that had embedded itself into the region. Whatever the case, the monster story continued to pop up periodically over the years. In July 1938, Nebraska's Federal Writer's Project published a version of the story in the 13th volume of their monthly "Tall Tales" publication. Their version of the story dubbed the creature "Giganticus Brutervious" and included such passages as:"Those who have been brave enough and strong enough to endure a glance at him say that his flashing green eyes spit fire, that with a head like a huge oil barrel, he looks like something one sees in a very bad dream, and that the least movement of his big pointed ears causes a tempest on the lake. As he rears and flips his powerful tail, the farmers become seasick for miles around.

In 1962, *Outdoor Nebraska* magazine ran a cover feature on the "Lake Walgren Monster." It seems the lake's name had been changed and as a result, so had the name of the creature. Fitting since there were so many versions of what the beast actually was to begin with.

The *Outdoor Nebraska* article noted:

"Lake Walgren, a 50-acre lake located in Sheridan County near Hay Springs, has a storied history of harboring Nebraska's best-known lake monster. The Lake Walgren monster has been variously described as a very large catfish, a large mudpuppy, and even as a giant, horned alligator-like beast that devours livestock and waterfowl. Its size has varied from "the size of a yearling steer" to "2 ft. broad and 10 or 12 ft. long."

Over the years, historians traced the source of the monstrous fabrication to John G. Maher, a Nebraskan adept at creating hoaxes and tall tales.

Maher was a successful newspaperman, politician and businessman. He was known to have created a fake "petrified man," and at one time, sank bags of soda into boiling springs near Chadron, afterwards proclaiming the "soda springs" had miraculous healing powers.

Historian Louise Pond wrote about Maher's schemes for *Nebraska History* and located some of his telegrams during her research. One which related to the Alkali Lake monster was posted to Maher from the Omaha paper he was a correspondent for. It read: "Have a tip that Bruce Heweitt and J. Mayes of Rushville solved the Hay Springs Lake mystery by finding a mermaid frozen in ice of lake. Wire 300-word story if above is correct, also rush photo of mermaid."

Maher's connection to the Omaha paper explains their publication of reports of the creature, and since they were connected to the *London Times*, this led to the tale being sent to papers abroad.

But is there any grain of truth to stories of a cryptid in Alkali Lake? The Alkali Lake monster frequently shows up on lists of lake monsters and cryptids but rarely is more than a brief passage written about it. Some cryptozoologists have speculated that there there's more to the tale of the Nebraska creature than pure newspaper fiction.

Peter Costello, in his book "In Search of Lake Monsters," commented on the Hay Springs stories:

"The difficulty with these American reports is that however they start, as mild editorial facetiousness or serious reports from actual witnesses, sooner or later they are turned into "American Folklore." So that what might have been acceptable as just credible becomes quite incredible. The Alkali Lake in Nebraska is an instance."

Costello places much of the blame on the 1938 Writer's Project and their use of the monster story. As he notes:

"The writers archly describe the horror of the monster, how his appearance made men mad or turned their hair white.

This is an example of folklorists at their worst. Rather than treat popular stories as topics of serious interest, the writers feel that to justify their spending time collecting and rehashing them, the stories have to be given a facetious treatment…They would have been better employed exploring the coincidence of their local folklore with Chinese mythology."Cryptozoologist Mark A. Hall speculated that there really had been a creature of some kind in the lake, possibly a "great horned alligator." Interestingly, there were corresponding reports of horned alligators in Texas, Florida, and the Mississippi delta. Such creatures were reported to have an exaggerated back crest and estimated to reach lengths of 75 feet. Hall's theory is interesting and it's important to consider there could have been sightings of *something* unusual in the lake. An alligator of any kind would have been out of place and certainly puzzled and/or

Other logical possibilities include an exceptionally large member of a known species. Some researchers have suggested there were

perhaps frightened any locals who encountered it.

Other logical possibilities include an exceptionally large member of a known species. Some researchers have suggested there were sightings of a large beaver in the region which would have accounted for reports of a large tail slapping the water.

Someone in the region, already in a fearful state and expecting to see a monster, could have construed any number of native animals for something more than normal.

Over the years, the citizens of Hay Springs have become proud of their legendary lake monster. In 1985, during the Hay Spring Centennial, a series of promotional items was produced that bore the image of the monster. While the committee had plenty of versions of the creature to choose from, they went with a depiction that commemorated the reported sighting by Hay Springs resident J.A. Johnson from 1923. Mermaid enthusiasts were likely disappointed. The monster rises from the water, serpent like, with large ears and bared fangs. T-shirts and buttons were printed with the monster's image and the tag line:"Hay Springs, NE Home of the Walgren Lake Monster"The monster has lived on in various forms. Author Mari Sandoz mentioned the creature in her book "Old Jules." She also wrote a short novelette, "Ossie and the Sea Monster," based on the legend.

The History Nebraska website even includes some brief information about the aquatic legend, noting:"Walgren Lake (formerly Alkali Lake) near Hay Springs, Nebraska has long been the purported home of an elusive "sea monster." Descriptions range from a "roaring, devastating sea reptile" that came on land to devour cows, horses, and cornfields, to a giant with flashing green eyes that spit fire, with a head like a huge oil barrel."

Remarkably, despite reports of hoaxes, name changes and more, the monster has, in a sense, survived. The citizens of Hay Springs have embraced their curious and unique legend and we can only wait to see if the creature will someday rise from the Nebraska waters once again.

Fig 1 Old vintage newspaper cartoon of the monster

Fig 2 T - shirt printed to celebrate the creature

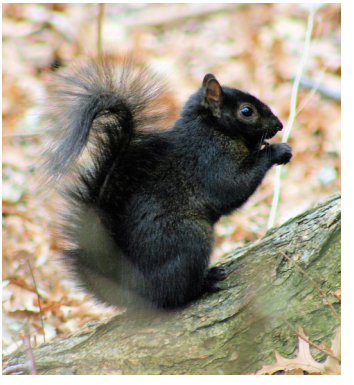
Black Squirrels in Hertfordshire

Richard George

I first saw a black squirrel when I was in psychotherapy in Letchworth Garden City, in north Hertfordshire when I was seventeen. My therapist, a sweet German-American lady, was very taken with them. Today there are around 25,000 of them in Hertfordshire, Bedfordshire and Cambridgeshire. They are melanistic examples of the American grey squirrel, *Sciurus carolinensis.*

It is thought a wealthy Victorian landowner in the area, possibly Herbrandt, the eleventh Duke of Bedford, imported black squirrels from the USA for a private menagerie, and some escaped. The earliest definite records are from 1912.

In some areas blacks are replacing their grey counterparts. Around Letchworth, Hitchin and Stevenage they outnumber greys. Various reasons have been suggested. The gene for black fur is dominant, so that if blacks and greys interbreed the offspring are more likely to be



Wikipedia under GNU Free Documentation License

dark. The black males may have higher testosterone levels. Dark fur may absorb heat energy better .(1,2).

The range of black squirrels is expanding. In February 2017 a black was sighted in the village of Redbourn, near St. Albans (3) This is significantly further south in Hertfordshire, south of the river Mimram, a natural boundary between rural north Hertfordshire and the commuter belt.

But this is not the whole story…

There is also melanism in the red squirrel, *sciurus vulgaris.* In 1865,one M.R. Pryor wrote that "While shooting near Watford I distinctly saw a black squirrel...but not knowing they were not often seen in England I did not shoot it." (4) Although this could have been an early " black grey " escapee, it is much more likely to have been a "black red."

Could some of today`s Hertfordshire black squirrel`s be black red squirrels? Sadly, no. This brings us to the tale of the red squirrels extinction in Hertfordshire. There was a catastrophic decline between 1900 and 1930, probably as a result of parapox spread by the greys, a disease like smallpox to which reds, including "black reds" , have no immunity. One of its last strongholds was where I grew up, in the Chiltern Hills south of Hitchin, around the villages of Preston and Whitwell. There is a scattering of sightings in this area from the 1940s (5). Local naturalist Michael Clark`s father, Bernard, saw one in Northaw Great Wood, south-east of Hatfield, in 1953, as did Bryan Sage, co-author of *The Birds of Hertfordshire,* in April of that year. These are the last known Hertfordshire red squirrel sightings (6) There are remote spots in the east of Hertfordshire where it might have clung on into the Sixties, like ancient Plashes Wood near Puckeridge This is a strange place, stuck in a kind of time-warp: when my late father and I visited it in the late 1980s we found a rusty old sign from the Thirties saying "BEWARE OF SNAKES!"

It may have been an adder hot-spot, but there were no red squirrels.

There is a “tail-piece” to all this: in the 1980s and 1990s there were reports of red squirrels from Shephalbury Park in the middle of Stevenage. But there was to be no happy ending. Grey squirrels can be erythristic, or rufous, and this was the explanation. By a cruel irony, the grey squirrels were impersonating the red. “I`m a red squirrel, honest!” “No you`re not,buddy.”

In the last 150 years, however, it is probable both “black grey” and “black red” squirrels have graced the beautiful countryside of my home county.

References

(1) Alice Thomas, Helen McRobie, “Frequency of “domineering” black squirrel sightings se to increase” (Anglia Ruskin University study, April 2010.)

(2) David Lister, Lewis Smith, “Squirrel wars: reds,greys and blacks battle for supremacy” (Times, London, 26 April 2008).

(3) Www.herstad.co.uk/news/have-you-seen-black-squirrels-in-redbourn-1-4873356.

(4) Keith Laidler, *Squirrels in Britain* (1980), p.28f.

(5) https://www.north-herts.gov.uk/home/museum/Hitchin`s-last-red-squirrel.

(6) Michael Clark, *Mammals,Amphibians and Reptiles of Hertfordshire* (2001), p.108ff.

Another strange spider

Mike and Terry Hardcastle and Rebecca Fechner

Flying Snake # 13 reported on an unusual species of spider in Uganda, Flying Snake # 14 here reports on an unusual spider seen by FS Co-Editor Mike Hardcastle`s sister and niece.

"An incident occurred in the 1990's on our property next to he Mount Kaputar National Park in North West NSW. Foxes got in and killed a number of our chooks, leaving quite a few bodies strewn about. The dead chickens were thrown over the fence near the creek behind the stables, as we knew the foxes would come back and take them later. The next night, my niece Rebecca and myself thought we'd have a look over the fence to see if all the bodies had been taken We climbed over the fence and shone the torch over the bank and we could see a dead hen, a few feet below us, but we also saw something moving on top of the body. We got down on our knees and shone the torch closer and were shocked to see a giant sandy coloured spider, at least the size of my hand or a bit bigger, moving slowly over the body of the hen! It was huge and presumably some kind of native bird eating spider. My niece cleared out in a hurry and I followed! A few wees later, a friend who lived in the National Park was driving home from work at night and as she was passing our property, she saw eyes reflecting back from her car lights, from what she at first thought was a large rat in the middle of the road. She slowed down to a stop, as the creature seemed agitated by her car lights and was running backwards and forwards across the road in front of her car. She suddenly realised that what she was looking at wasn't a rat, but a huge sandy coloured spider, agitated in the headlights! Both of these incidents occurred in the vicinity of Bullawa Creek. “

“ I believe this might be a large example of a (male) southern hawker dragonfly *Aeshna cyanea.* Typically has a body length of approx 2.8 inches and a wingspan of 4.3 inches.”

Carl Marshall in e-mail to me on July 20th 2018:

“These dragonflies mainly inhabit well-vegetated areas, small lakes, and garden ponds, but they are known to wander wildly, and they are often seen in gardens and woodlands. “

Mike Hardcastle sent me this image of a bird - eating spider Mike had as a pet in Queensland which reminded him of the mystery spider mentioned on the previous page.

A Whale of a Tale: A Moby Grape Ghost Story

Richard George

Further to my piece on cryptozoology and rock in *FS* 4/11 ,I`ve found a bit more material on the circumstances of Moby Grape`s eccentric fifth album *20 Granite Creek* (1971). This,to recap, was recorded in a house, 20 Granite Creek Road, in the wooded hills above Santa Cruz on the West Coast, close to a Mystery Spot where gravity supposedly goes AWOL, in an area where Bigfoot has been seen. What I didn`t know, until I read a new book by Cam Cobb called *What`s Big and Purple and Lives in the Ocean? The Moby Grape Story* (Jawbone Books, 2018), is that 20 Granite Creek Road was haunted! Have we a Window Area on our hands here?

The building dated to the 1890s, and was built by two spinsters. It was later owned by two sisters who were teachers, Vera and Phyllis Thomas, but by the time Reprise bought the house so the band could reconvene and record there, it had been empty for a while and was 2deteriorated". It had four acres of land and seven bedrooms.

According to Mark Alexander, the band`s live-in caretaker and roadie and friend of drummer Don Stevenson, "One of the spinsters had died in her upstairs bedroom...and they had boarded up the room after her death. We only found out belatedly that her room had been reopened just prior to our occupancy. Sitting on his bed one morning, writing a poem, Alexander saw the ghost of an old lady staring at him, "looking upset". Then she "simply vanished". "If ghosts do exist", he says looking back, "I would say that the prim and proper Victorian spinster was trying to express her extreme upset over her home being defiled by sex,drugs and rock n` roll ". Ah,yes,the Generation Gap…

Then one day a little girl, daughter of a friend of Don`s girlfriend Mary, called out "Oh Mama, look at the pretty lady!" The adults

saw nothing. And a few weeks later an artists friend of the band, Helen Hersh, who had been given the haunted bedroom, found the ghost manifesting almost every night. “Finally”, according to Mark Alexander, “Helen had had enough and told the woman to get the hell out! The ghost obliged, and no one ever saw her again…”

Finally Mark Alexander speculates on string theory, other dimensions and such in a New Agey manner of Californi-ay. He`s a highly articulate witness, but the problem is, needless to say...had he, and the other adults, been smoking something other than tobacco?

Did any of this influence the record? Two of the tracks, Apocalypse and *Horse out In The Rain* are very spooky. Recording in the house, specifically in what had been the library, was technically problematic, meaning the sound quality is very poor. One droll critic, Lilian Roxon, referred to it as “recorded twenty thousand leagues under the sea”, mixing up her Melvilles and her Jules Vernes. The album flopped commercially, and had very mixed reviews: our *New Musical Express* described it as “appalling” , “ a disillusioning postscript” ,and a “ humiliating and short-lived exercise.” Was all this the spinster`s revenge? Some might say so.

Another (and much larger) haunted rock n` roll recording studio is the Chateau d`Herouville, the Honky Chateau of Elton John`s LP, where the Grateful Dead played a legendary set in 1971, around the same time the Grape were recording. The evidence here is actually less compelling than at 20 Granite Creek Road, although not dissimilar. David Bowie recorded *Low* there, and was “freaked out” by one of the bedrooms: given his drug intake and general occult preoccupations this counts for rather little. Brian Eno claimed he was woken every morning by invisible hands shaking his shoulder...hypnopompia, anyone? According to a piece about the building online, “There is a haunted bedroom in the left wing which is kept permanently closed” (ernould.com/English/StudSoun75.html).

It would be a hoot to see Zak Bagans doo ne of his *Ghost Adven-*

- *tures* programmes at 20 Granite Creek Road or the French chateau, including EVPs. Speaking of which...isn`t it strange recording studios don`t seem to pick up communications from dead rock stars?

Location of Santa Cruz County in California. Wikipedia Commons Attribution Share alike

Notes and Queries

Huge and weird shaped hail in Sydney Australia

International media December 22nd 2018

There were reports of giant golf ball sized hail and incredible video images of damaged cars and the hail falling into waters next to Sydney Opera House on the Net just before Christmas, some photos (which can`t be re-produced here due to copyright laws) showed unusually patterned hail in the form of flower petal shapes.

Fossil snake in Ireland or the one St. Patrick missed

Thanks to Bob Skinner for passing on this information (1)

A Strange Find

" A few months ago men were quarrying at a place called the "Rock" near Bundoran (2) As they were working they found a

1. duchas.ie web site. 2. In Donegal

snake about ten feet from the surface of the earth. It was so fragile that it had to be taken out in sections. The groove in which the fossilized animal lay is still to be seen to be seen in the rock. It is five feet long, and one and a half inched in diameter. The rock must have formed over the reptile because no fissure or cleft could be discovered in the rock. It is said it must have been before St Patrick`s time because it would take at least fifteen hundred years to form five feet of rock . The remains of this animal were sent to the Museum in Dublin."

An Irish jackal and another odd animal

The present Lord Dunboyns when he sold Knockpogus Castle about twenty years ago had a great auction and sold the glass case containing the strange animal but to whom, Matty Bannon does not know. The name 'Jackal' is still preserved in the district as one of the boys who took part in the hunt and search at the time is nicknamed 'The Jackal'. One day some years ago the drainage men were cleaning a drain on Mr Pat White's farm in the parish of Fulla. There roses a strange animal up out of the drain, the like of which none of them saw before. It was about the size of a terrier, brown in colour with a large hairy snout and a long hairy tail. It had long thin legs and very long claws on each paw. When the boys pursued it it took refuge in Listenny Lough. As several lambs were found dead in the district it was thought that it was this animal killed them. Matty Bannon also relates that there is an uncommon animal inhabits the mountains between Clare and Galway. From the Burren district, right across the country to the Fearle district. Matty's wife who is from the Stearle district says she often heard its weird cry at night and that it kills lambs and is called the 'Cat Crainn'. it lives in the caves under the cliffs near the sea. (1)

1. duchas.ie

A White Lynx?

Saginaw News September 12th 1907

Sanford

"The animal supposed to be a white lynx is making things quite interesting for people living near the patch of woods about three miles from the village where it seems to be making its home. Sheep belonging to farmers in that vicinity have been found killed and mangled...one evening last week Wm.Ellis whose house is in a small clearing surrounded with woods, was much surprised, on stepping out of doors, early in the evening, to come face to face with the huge white cat walking along the fence close to the house. He went back for a gun but when he returned it had disappeared…"

Giant Turtle in the Persian Gulf

Animal and Zoo Magazine January 1939 p. 36

" And now for a query from Miss Z. Dickson, Endsleigh, Grayshott, Hindhead, Surrey, who asks : "Can you tell me in what seas the giant leathery turtle lives? I had believed they only inhabited the Pacific and Atlantic and was very surprised when on a recent visit to the Persian Gulf an Arab fishing boat caught one in its nets and brought it in the next morning. The turtle was dead, but it was deposited on the roadside for everyone to see and crowds collected!

"When I heard of this strange `monster` I went to see it and discovered that it was a leathery turtle six feet long and four feet broad, certainly larger than the one in the Natural History

Museum , South Kensington, which was caught off the Scilly Isles.

“ The turtle was such a wonder to the natives that very soon an ingenious Arab removed it to his back-yard and charged two annas per person to view it, which was gladly paid by those who had not seen it. “ I should be interested to know whether this one caught at Kuwait was a `stray` or whether other readers of this Magazine have records of these turtles inhabitants the Indian Ocean or thereabouts.”

White Jackdaw in Hertfordshire

Animal and Zoo magazine January 1939 p. 13

“ A white jackdaw has been seen near St Albans.”

Very eccentric magpie with gender dysphoria?!

Animal and Zoo magazine January 1939 p. 13

“ At Newcastle a pet magpie , who despite his sex is known as “Maggie” has been caged for stealing powder puffs, swallowing soap and returning it in the shape of lather through his bill, pulling out clothes pegs from the neighbours` washing , and smoking six cigarettes a day. “

New Species of Snake

The Sun October 11th 2018

Mark O`Shea, who once appeared on the Channel 4 programme with myself and some others in March 1997 ,called `For the Love Of…` has had a snake named after him : "A newly - found snake in Indonesia has been named O`Shea`s pipesnake after Mark O` Shea, 62, Professor of Snakes at Wolverhampton University."

Congratulations Mark!

Macclesfield Alpine Newts Still Thriving

I was in a conversation with a local poet about matters cryptozoological (as one does) when the banter passed onto the population of Alpine newts which had spread out from a local garden that I wrote about in an earlier issue of Flying Snake. Well apparently the population is still growing, despite our occasional cold and wet winters.

Macclesfield UFO of the 1980s

Fortean Times Christmas 2018 p.29

"In 1980 (December 29th) a family was driving south from Macclesfield,Cheshire, in a convoy of cars when they saw an object over a quarry. It was like a fiery angel moving slowly west from near Wildboarclough. They stopped and got out to watch. Despite the quiet surroundings there was no noise from the object, now circular and moving "so slowly it should have fallen out of the sky." Next morning in daylight, heading into Macclesfield alone, one witness saw the same object coming from a field and descending across the road towards a reservoir. He could see that behind the glow there was a metal shape."

Wide World Magazine Early 1950s?

THE FISHERMAN WHO GOT AWAY

FANTASTIC angling yarns are told about "the one that got away" but rare, indeed, is the story of a fish that kidnapped its would-be captor.

Such an event is startling enough, but a mystery monster of the Pacific, off New Hebrides, has a greater claim to notoriety, for it swam off with two launches and seven people!

It happened one afternoon late in 1957, when Captain J. Barley, of the New Hebrides Condominium vessel *Don Quixote,* was returning to his ship in the motor launch *Elaine.*

With him were his engineer and a friend named Bouvier, and they were carrying stores back to the *Don Quixote.* When nearing the Georges Philippe Pass, from Segond Channel, they spotted a small launch off the starboard bow and a few hundred yards distant.

The other vessel was travelling towards them, and four persons aboard her were waving frantically. However, there did not seem to be any cause for alarm, for the craft was making fair speed towards the Segond Channel. Captain Barley continued on his way.

After a few minutes, his attention was claimed by shouts from the other boat, and it was noticed that the four people were making wild gestures of appeal and calling hoarsely across the water, while their launch zig-zagged on a crazily erratic course.

The *Elaine* turned about to investigate, and when he drew alongside, Captain Barley recognized a friend, M. Douyere, aboard the 21-feet, half-cabin launch.

M. Douyere reported that he had anchored off the west coast of near-by Malo Island to do some fishing. A mysterious monster had snatched at the anchor and had been hauling his launch around for nearly three hours, first towards the open waters of the Pacific, then towards Bruat Channel and, finally, into Georges Philippe Pass, where the Captain had found them.

M. Douyere and his three friends were taken on board, and his launch was made fast to the *Elaine.* Everybody lent a hand in trying to heave up the smaller vessel's anchor, which was attached to four fathoms of 5/16ths. chain, but the chain was pulled so tight that it would not yield an inch of slack.

At first, they were inclined to believe that the anchor had fouled the bottom of the sea bed, but then it was noticed that both launches were beginning to move, and very shortly they were being towed at four knots into the Channel.

Captain Barley ordered full speed ahead, in an effort to drag the powerful fish into shallow water, where he could dive down and see what manner of creature was strong enough to pull the two vessels along at such speed; but even the 100 h.p. Thornycroft diesel engine of the *Elaine* failed to impede the progress of the mystery monster.

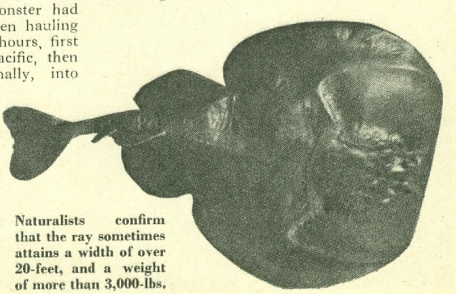
Suddenly, it zig-zagged towards Luganville and, diving deeper, tugged the 21-feet launch almost underwater, and caused the *Elaine* to list perilously.

It soon became obvious that both launches were in danger of being pulled under, and Captain Barley decided to release the anchor chain.

There seemed to be no other course of action open to them, and the men who had been "kidnapped" by a fish returned to shore, keenly disappointed that they had been unable to solve the mystery of the giant creature of the Pacific.

Although they never expected that their story would be believed, it was received with understanding nods of the head by the local natives, for they had their own tales to tell of a monster that for months had tyrannized their fishermen.

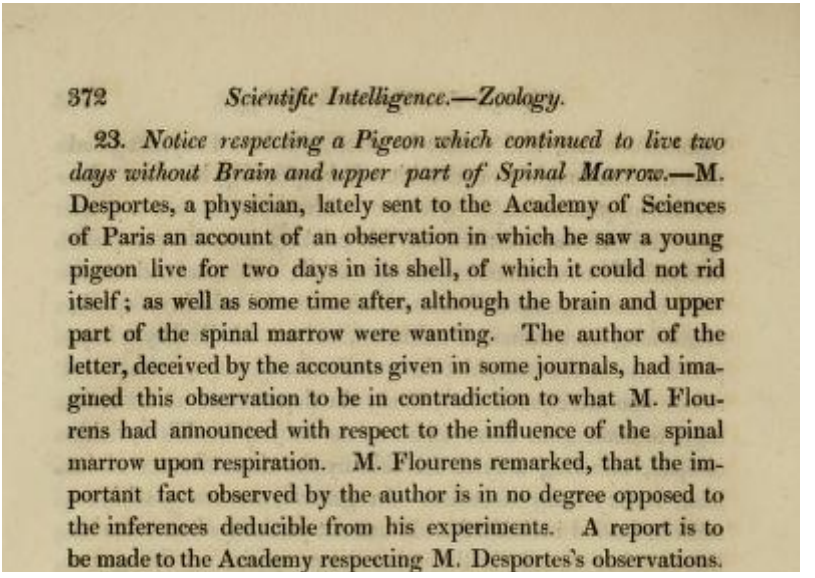
It was, they claimed, the "grandfather of all giant rays," a creature "big as a cloud and as strong as the wind."



Naturalists confirm that the ray sometimes attains a width of over 20-feet, and a weight of more than 3,000-lbs.

Old story of a brain-less pigeon (Nothing new here then!)

The Edinburgh New Philosophical Journal vol 7 April - October 1829



372 *Scientific Intelligence.—Zoology.*

23. *Notice respecting a Pigeon which continued to live two days without Brain and upper part of Spinal Marrow.*—M. Desportes, a physician, lately sent to the Academy of Sciences of Paris an account of an observation in which he saw a young pigeon live for two days in its shell, of which it could not rid itself; as well as some time after, although the brain and upper part of the spinal marrow were wanting. The author of the letter, deceived by the accounts given in some journals, had imagined this observation to be in contradiction to what M. Flourens had announced with respect to the influence of the spinal marrow upon respiration. M. Flourens remarked, that the important fact observed by the author is in no degree opposed to the inferences deducible from his experiments. A report is to be made to the Academy respecting M. Desportes's observations.

Fortean Fox nearly gets fried

The story of this foolish fox was found by myself in **The Sun**, **December 28th 2018:**

What the Fox

" Shocked Kim Fryer found a fox curled up fast asleep on top of the microwave in Mitcham, South West London."

Ultra loyal pet dog in China

The Guardian November 14th 2018

" A dog has been waiting for more than 80 days on the road where its owner died, it has been reported. The animal was spotted waiting by the road in Hohhot, Inner Mongolia, where its owner died in August. Footage of the loyal dog has been viewed more than 1.4. million times on the Chinese social media website Sina Weibo...A taxi driver who often drives on the road that many people have attempted to help the animal…"

Do cassowaries give milk to their young?

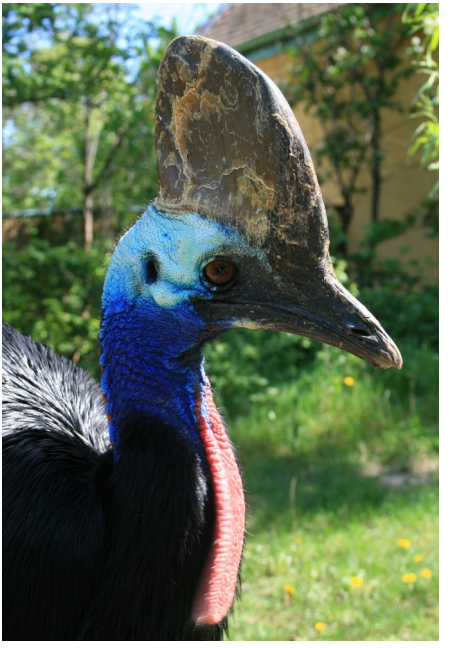
Perilous Paradise by A.J.Marshall

Zoo and National Nature Magazine August 1937 p.13

Yes I know what you`re thinking, Dr Devo has de-evolved far too much in issue 14 of this , your favourite anomalies magazine, but bare with me! If the author of this story is to be believed then we have at least some very interesting bit of animal folklore here, and who are we to say the original witnesses were wrong?

"... Many quaint beliefs are associated with the more prominent animals. Perhaps the most extraordinary is the widespread theory that cassowarys suckle their young! The promi

- nent fleshy wattle which hangs from the mature cassowary`s brilliant -hued neck is responsible. Natives all over the country swear that the baby cassowarys attach themselves to this "nipple" and so extract *su-su* (milk) for their sustenance. Time and again I have dissected birds which the natives declared were females (because of the wattles) and revealed them to be males. I have prevailed on natives to manipulate the wattles with their fingers in the impossible hope of obtaining a few drops of some sort of liquid to substantiate their claim. And it is surprising the number of Europeans in New Guinea who subscribe to the native belief. I soon gave up trying to convince people that birds could not perform such feats…"



Above: Southern Cassowary at the Tiergarten Schönbrunn in Vienna by Manfredd Werner/Tsui Wikipedia GNU Free Documentation Licence Version 1.2

An extinct race of large British Mastiff

Swythamley and Neighbourhood by Brocklehurst

I found this brief extract from `**Swythamley and Neighbourhood**` by Brocklehurst (1874) page 6

" Mention is made that previous to the distruction (sic) of the Abbey, a magnificent race of great white mastiffs (molossi) were kept by the monks, but, after their dispersion by Henry VIII, the breed of dogs appear to have been lost."

The Molossus was an ancient breed of dog from Southern Europe. Carl Marshall our FS sub-editor told me that his family owns a breed descended from the molossi.

Ginger coloured rabbits

July 27th and 30th 2018 on the **Macclesfield Memories Facebook group:**

T.P.: "I was told about these anomalously coloured ginger rabbits or pale sandy red " a few years ago. "One was near Swanscoe and also "black rabbits at Rostherne "years ago". S.Mc K: "There are quite a few of the ginger rabbits on a farm where I go near Monks Heath, see an odd black one too." Monk`s Heath is in East Cheshire.

Weird behaviour of a goldfish

Zoo The National Nature Magazine September 1937

Letters pages , pp 48—49:

" I have heard of goldfish being frozen in a lump of ice and surviving , but the following escape seems even more remarkable. " A few years ago a friend of mine was changing her goldfish`s water by an open window. Suddenly the fish leapt out of his bowl and through the window, which was four storeys up (1).My friend rushed down stairs, picked it off the pavement, and took it in her hands back to its bowl. It is still living happily to-day."

Miss P.Ross Stevenson, 23 Lauder Road, Grange, Edinburgh 9.

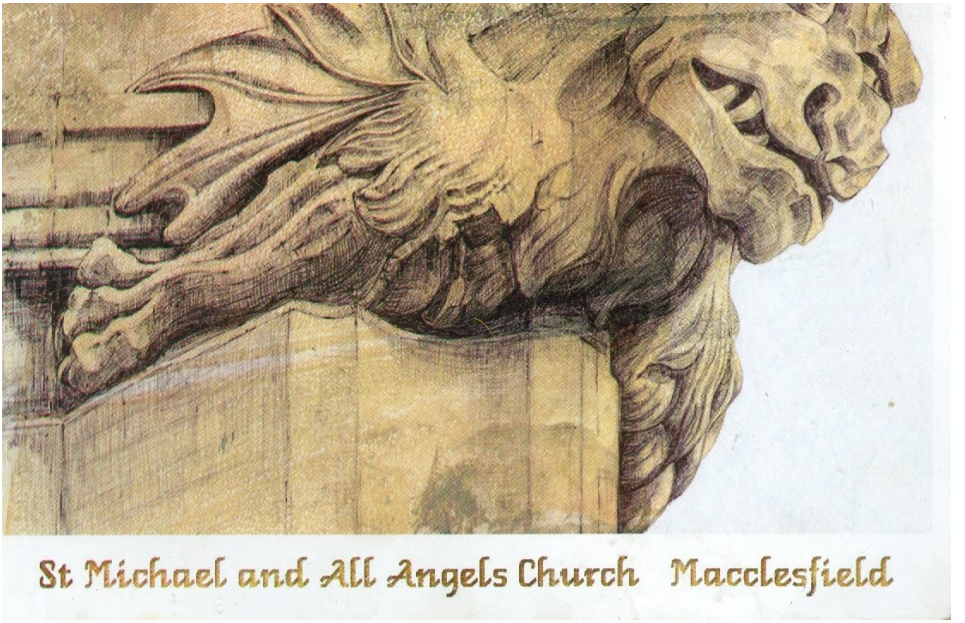
Surprising location for a dead Pine Marten

Pigeon Watch Forum

I was surprised to read on the Pigeon Watch Forum , in a post by `Mice!` on October 18th 2017 that whoever `Mice!` is, he/she saw a dead road killed pine marten which he then took home and buried. I asked `Mice!` if he could recall more information and he replied he`d seen it "probably on the A574 between Culcheth and Risley…" This is near Warrington , Cheshire. Co-incidentally this is very near the venue for Weird Weekend North organised by cryptozoologist Glen Vaudrey.

(1) I am not sure how high above the ground a "story" would be in 1937.

Gargoyle at St Michael`s Church Macclesfield Cheshire UK



Huge Python in Hong Kong

On Christmas day 2018 a lady friend of my aunt`s, (who used to live in Hong Kong, both my aunt and her friend I mean) told me that in the 1970s or 1980s she had seen a huge python about 20ft long crossing a road near the village of Stanley on Hong Kong island that the bus she was travelling on passed by. Possibly an escaped pet ?

Huge otter

Originally in **British Newspaper Archive**

A farmer, residing at Ballough, in the Glen of Arhalow, having lost several sheep, which had been apparently seized by the throat and worried, lay in waiting one night, when he perceived a large dark animal go to one of the sheep, and seize it by the neck. He fired and killed the beast , which turned out to be an immense otter.

Both stories above and below are from **The Worcester Chronicle of June 23rd 1858**

Flying Snake in Caerphilly

Originally in **British Newspaper Archive**

On the morning of the 16th inst., Mrs Mary Richards, landlady of the Cefn Inn, Cefn, near Risca, states that she, being at the time in her own garden, heard a rustling noise, similar to the shaking of a leather apron, and on looking up distinctly saw an animal body shaped like a snake, with wings about the size of common bellows,(!) flying about 14 feet from the ground! *Bristol Mercury*

Blood curdling cry of a frog

I found a note that in about 1981 someone in Macclesfield had heard a frog literally scream (not croak) as it was being toyed with by a cat.

Creationist Creature Chronicles Part One

Here is an item from the journal **Creation vol 19 no. 10 May 2018.**

Creation takes snippets of news items from New Scientist magazine and comments on them from a creationist point of view: For example: "Silence of the crickets. 24 February 2018 p.17 " Male crickets woo by `singing` - vigorously rubbing their wings together so that bumps and ridges scrape, making sound. But in recent decades, up to 95 per cent of male crickets on the Hawaiian islands of Kauai and Oahu have evolved flat wings, leaving them mute." It turns out that a particular parasitic fly homes in on the male`s song and sprays the cricket with its eggs. The larvae then eat the cricket. But it`s not cricket to label this as `evolution`. This mutation that smooths out the wings means that those with the mutation don`t attract the fly, and so survive to pass on their mutated genes. The mutation involves a loss of genetic information, so the cricket is then at a disadvantage in the mating stakes. This is devolution. "

Evolution not possible for the giraffe.

This extract here is from the **Creation Science Movement pamphlet # 412 November 2018**: "Evolutionists believe that the giraffe evolved from a creature similar to the okapi. This of course would mean a slow series of gradual changes, each produced by a random mutation, followed by a natural selection. However, simplistic elongation of the legs and neck is not sufficient as this article has shown (the article on previous pages had commented on the intelligent design of a strong heart, thicker arteries than many mammals and legs that "will not balloon with higher blood pressure…") A comprehensive re-engineering of the okapi would be required…" The pamphlet then lists the following 16 changes the okapi would have to undergo *if* it had evolved into a giraffe:

1. Longer legs & neck.
2. Thick tough skin on legs
3. Narrow leg blood vessels
4. Enlarged strong heart
5. Strong long neck arteries
6. Nerve pressure sensors
7. Arteries that can constrict
8. Neck veins with 7 valves
9. A “rete mirabile” (Wonderful net, a mass of spongy tissue below the brain.)
10. Enlarged cervical vertebrae
11. Ball & socket joints on each cervical vertebra
12. A nuchal ligament
13. A corresponding sub-cervical muscle
14. Modified dorsal vertebrae
15. Narrow trachea
16. Enlarged lungs

Gleanings from an old English Dictionary

In mid September 2018 I saw an old English dictionary which came into the book room in Oxfam where I work. It was titled the `Comprehensive Johnson`s Dictionary `(1852.) Here are some interesting entries

DRAGON A winged serpent, see below from Wikipedia Commons.

ZEBRA An Indian beast, a kind of ass. (Hold on I thought zebras lived in Africa unless there was once an Indian cryptid species ?)

(Image below - Friedrich-Johann-Justin– Bertuch Mythical Creature,Dragon,1806 Wikipedia Commons)

CREATION OF THE WORLD 4008 B.C.

Toads in stomachs

Both below From Bob Skinner

Cumberland Pacquet April 1st 1828

"Wonderful! Mr R.Hampson, surgeon of this town (Bolton) has furnished us with the following account of the existence of a toad in the stomach of a boy, named Butterworth, of Ainsworth ,in this vicinity : - The father of the boy...waited on Mr Hampson, on Sunday morning last,with his son and described his complaint. He had been much afflicted for the last three years with a severe gnawing pain in the stomach and left side, which at times was excruciating; - and to use the boy`s expression, "he was sure there was some varmint within him" ...and while yielding to the effects of the medicine...the lad felt an obstruction in the rectum,and by manual assistance succeeded in dragging forth a large full grown and perfect toad! The boy took it into the house to his astonished and overjoyed parents and it was laid on the hearth,when,dragging its legs under its belly, it expired…"

Cumberland Pacquet August 11th 1856

**A TOAD IN A BOY`S STOMACH "**About three o` clock on Thursday morning, a boy, nine years of age named Jonathan Micklethwaite , son of William Micklethwaite,farm labourer, Alverthorpe, near Wakefield, parted with a toad. The reptile which is alive, was put in a basin of water, and has since become much swollen. Its body now measures about 3 1/2 inches long by 2 1/2 inches broad, and its colour is dark brown streaked with black...The medical attendant on the family says the boy must have swallowed the toad in the spawn."

Huge Bullfrog Tadpole

StrangeArk shared a post.
Yesterday at 15:29 ·
An invasive species eradication program caught a huge bullfrog tadpole in Arizona . . .

Above: Sent by Bob Skinner

Huge Goose Egg

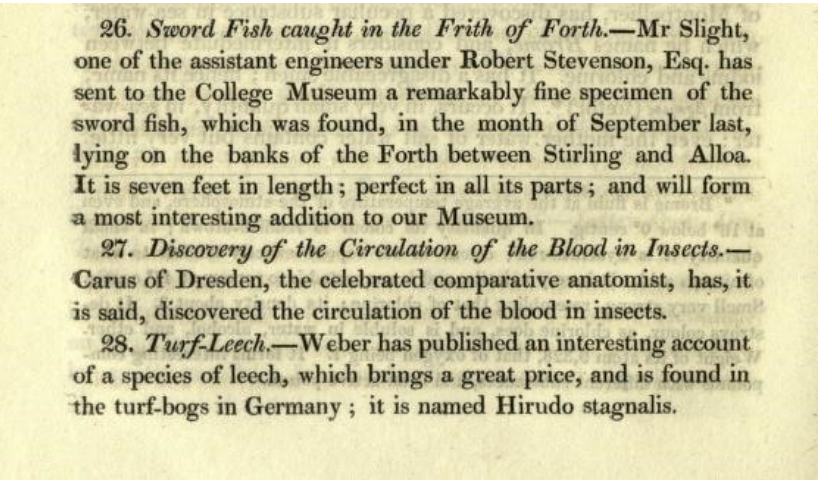
West Jersey Pioneer March 14th 1863

"The lay of the lost minstrel is no comparison to the lay of a Cumberland County (1) goose, now lying on our table - it was brought in by Wm. Garrison , of Stoe Creek, whose fowl laid this huge egg. It weighs one pound, and measures ten and a half inches over the round , and twelve and three quarters inches over the oval. Now if any man can beat this on an egg from a common domestic fowl, instead of saying "trot out your horse," we say "waddle up your goose."

Sword fish, Circulation of Blood in Insects, Turf - Leech

The New Edinburgh Philosophical Journal Vol 2

October 1826 - April 1827



26. *Sword Fish caught in the Frith of Forth.*—Mr Slight, one of the assistant engineers under Robert Stevenson, Esq. has sent to the College Museum a remarkably fine specimen of the sword fish, which was found, in the month of September last, lying on the banks of the Forth between Stirling and Alloa. It is seven feet in length; perfect in all its parts; and will form a most interesting addition to our Museum.

27. *Discovery of the Circulation of the Blood in Insects.*—Carus of Dresden, the celebrated comparative anatomist, has, it is said, discovered the circulation of the blood in insects.

28. *Turf-Leech.*—Weber has published an interesting account of a species of leech, which brings a great price, and is found in the turf-bogs in Germany; it is named Hirudo stagnalis.

Cambridgeshire Winged Cat of 1894

In the Cambridge Chronicle, 1894: “In August 1894, a cat with wings like those of a duckling was being exhibited by David Badcock of Reach. Apparently later it was stolen and turned up in Liverpool, but had lost its wings.”

There was a report of a winged cat in Fleetwood just before the great storm and floods of October 1927.

Huge Cow in Australia

This story appeared in the Daily Mail of November 28th 2018 and other British media . An amazing photo accompanied it but for copyright reasons I can`t re-produce it here.

" At 6ft 4 inches and weighing nearly one and a half tons, he certainly stands out from the herd. But then Knickers, a seven - year old steer, is double the size of the normal black and white Holstein—Friesan. He towers over the dark brown wagyu cattle that keep him company that keep him company at his farm in Myalup, near Perth ,Western Australia. And although Knickers contains enough meat to make 3,000 burgers, he has been spared from the barbecue because he is too big for the local abattoir: Owner Geoff Pearson bought the steer - a castrated male - for £225 a year old.

` We had a Brahman steer which was a friend of his, ` the farmer told local media. `His name was Bra - so we had Bra and Knickers. We never thought he would turn into big Knickers. He was always a standout. Then I realised he wasn`t stopping growing`. The steer is believed to be the biggest in Australia. According to Guinness World Records, the world`s tallest is Bellino, an Italian chlanina ox, at 6ft 7 in. Vets say Knickers probably grew so big because he was castrated young. "

By the way I am 6ft 3 inches tall so this cow is 1 inch bigger than I am!

Sculpture of Loch Ness Monster on a beach

1919 - 1938 `These Tremendous Years` The Daily Express 1939

Feral Chickens Besiege Village

Metro August 17 2018

THE BANTAM MENACE

200 Feral Chickens Run Amok On Estate...And Postie `Too Scared` To Deliver

" A private housing estate has been overrun by 200 chickens `scaring away` the postman and leaving residents in fear of a health

hazard. The `feral` flock was created after a rooster and hen were abandoned by their owners when they left the new-build estate in Diss, Norfolk, earlier this year. Now scores of chickens and six roosters roam residential roads, with dozens of new chicks each week….Some residents complain of noise nuisance as the cocks start crowing at 4 am - and revealed their postman has refused to do his round…"

Troglodytes and Monsters in Canada

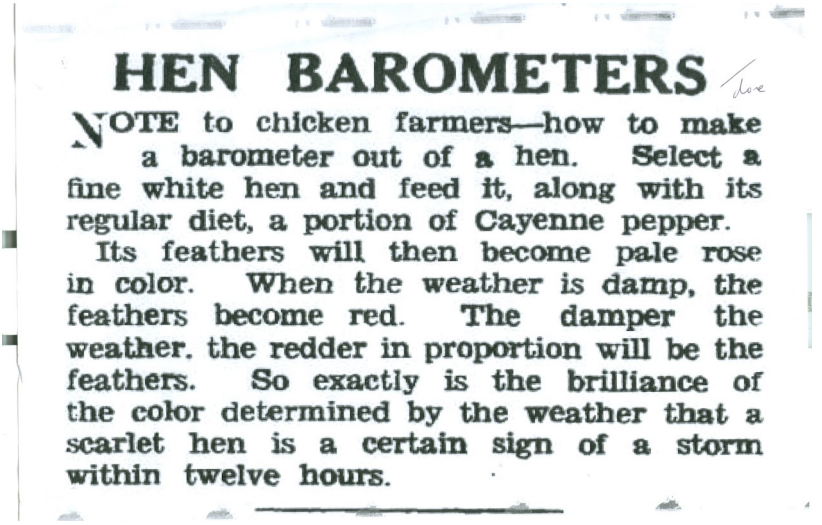
Gary Mangiacopra the veteran Fortean/cryptozoologist and I have been exchanging items of mutual interest for at least a year now (as of November 2018). Here is an extract from the Center for Bigfoot Studies, Bigfoot Times, July 2009

"Gary Mangiacopra passed along a copy of the now defunct *Adventure* magazine, December 1948. There is a section called "Ask Adventure", in which many gold seekers in the Nehannie Valley (Headless Valley) Northwest Territories, Canada turned up missing "...who disappeared amongst the mountains to the northward…"There is a short passage on page 111 "...where strange monsters of fearful size and ferocity roamed." Another area "...adding that the country to the northward was thought by the Indians to be haunted by a race of troglodytes, twice the size of ordinary humans, who went about naked save for their coating of evil-smelling hair, and lost no chance to carry off any Indians. This area is also noted as " Headless Valley."

Hen Barometers

Possibly from Trove and Loes Modderman

Date and paper unknown



HEN BAROMETERS

NOTE to chicken farmers—how to make a barometer out of a hen. Select a fine white hen and feed it, along with its regular diet, a portion of Cayenne pepper.

Its feathers will then become pale rose in color. When the weather is damp, the feathers become red. The damper the weather. the redder in proportion will be the feathers. So exactly is the brilliance of the color determined by the weather that a scarlet hen is a certain sign of a storm within twelve hours.

On September 7th 2018 I posted this on the **Ethnoherpetology Facebook** group:

Giant bi-pedal lizard in Papua New Guinea?

"I read in a book titled Journey into the Stone Age by David M.Davis (1970) that within living memory there were large lizards capable of walking on their back legs in Australia or Papua New Guinea that dropped down from trees onto people. "

LETTERS

A large eel - like animal in Lake Bala Wales in about 1952

Although this letter reached me a long time ago (written to me on April 21st 1995 to be precise) I considered it interesting enough to put in Flying Snake as I am almost certain it hasn`t appeared before,so read on!

Mr E.R. Lucas,

6 Fford Y Gerddi

Bala

Gwynedd LL23 3AY

Dear Mr Muirhead. “I am writing in reply to your letter in our local paper. I don`t have much information about the monster in Bala lake I can only tell you what I saw about 43 years ago (i.e. c. 1952 - Richard.)

There was a place which was known as sandy pool (no longer there since the level of the lake was lowered) however, all the local kids used to swim at this spot, it was about 150 yards from the old Dee Bridge, after we`d been swimming we would run along the pavement to Dee Bridge with the purpose of drying ourselves. On this particular time we ran to the bridge where there was a well known local fisherman fishing off the bridge. (Old Jim Wood.) We knew better than to go near him when he was fishing, we got up on the lakeside wall of the bridge and looking down into the water coming from under the bridge was what looked like a huge eel. It was what we thought at

the time to be between 12 and 14 feet long very black and was moving very slowly. It was as round as a large bucket. We tried to get Mr Wood to come and look but by the time he came across it had gone too far into the lake.

I left Bala when I was 15 but on coming back here 22 years ago I have heard that "The Monster" (?) has been seen in the lake on a number of occasions. "

Yours sincerely E.R.Lucas

Carl says this is very unusual indeed, length wise for an eel.

+

Veteran cryptozoologist Gary Mangiacopra has been passing on some literature in exchange for copies of Flying Snake for at least a year now, particularly letters to early issues of **Fate** magazine. Here are some of the more extraordinary (to my mind) of the items.

Stalin`s Favourite Poem?

Fate vol 6 no 1 Issue no 34 January 1953

June Henry,

Detroit, Michigan

About five years ago my mother had a dream in which she was reciting a poem that was Stalin`s favourite. On awakening the only two lines she could remember were , " **In Notre Dame a horseman waits, "** and the last line was , **" To him who never writes a wonderful letter waits. "** I would like to know if any of your readers have ever heard of such a poem.

Well I Googled both of the above phrases/ verses but came up with nothing.

According to Wikipedia`s entry on Stalin`s poetry : Before he became a Bolshevik revolutionary and the leader of the Soviet Union, Joseph Stalin was a promising poet.

Following pages and below, other letters from **Fate.**

[FATE - 1952 January]

-[4]-

DATE.....Volume 5, Number 1, Issue Number 25
ARTICLE...Phantom Lights In Oklahoma
AUTHOR....William Bathlot
PAGES.....48-50
PAGE.....50

There was no blood, no feathers, no hair and no footsteps, except our own, in the fine blown sand that covered the earth.

I went back to Forgan, Oklahoma, on a visit a year ago. That night, far in the distance to the southwest we saw two of the ghost lights. These were not car lights, for cars do not travel deep Oklahoma blow sand where there are no roads. Sometimes I wonder if these ghostly lights are the spirits of men who died in old No Man's Land when Judge Colt ruled the Oklahoma Pandhandl with his six-gun!

[FATE - 1953 March]

DATE.....Volume 6, Number 3, Issue Number 36
FEATURE.....True Mystic Experiences
PAGES.....52

FIREBALLS IN THE FAMILY

Mrs. E. J. Church
Rushville, Indiana

ONE evening in 1901 when my husband was 10 years old and living in the country with his grandparents, there was a severe lighting storm such as happens in the summer months. He and his grandparents were seated in the living room, reading, when all at once a fireball about 12 inches in diameter rolled out of the telephone and across the room, set fire to the lace curtains and disappeared.

Another more recent experience of his was in 1938 when he was at work in an auto repair shop. There was an electrical storm in the afternoon and as it abated he and another man came and stood in the doorway. As they looked outside, they saw a large fireball about 20 inches in diameter. It rolled from the top of the courthouse steeple, down the side of the courthouse and onto some telephone wires, rolling along the wires sometimes on top and sometimes underneath. When it came to the pole nearest my husband it rolled down the pole and out into the street and exploded with enough force to knock my husband and the other man to the floor. However, they were uninjured.

My own experience occurred one summer afternoon when I visited the dentist for a tooth extraction. A sudden electrical storm appeared and when the dentist finished and I got out of the chair, a large fireball about 36 inches in diameter rolled out of the X-ray machine. It rolled slowly past me and two other people, passing through two rooms, two doors and and on out into the street, where it disappeared without explosion.

DATE.....Volume 6, Number 4, Issue Number 37
FEATURE.....True Mystic Experiences
PAGES.....77-78

SAVED BY A DREAM

Wallace R. Kennedy
Red Rock, Arizona

IN 1933 my wife and I arrived in the little coal mining town of Trinidad, Colorado. I was unemployed and was desperate for a job of any kind. Quite by accident I met a man named Jim Scruggs, who was an experienced old miner. He told me that he and his son, a boy of 16, were opening up a wagon mine, as such small properties are called. He offered me employment on a share and share alike basis. I was to go with him and his son the next morning at seven o'clock to start work.

That night I was off to bed early to be well rested for my hard work of the morrow. I dreamed that my grandfather who raised me and had been dead since 1921 appeared to me and said, "Don't go with Scruggs."

Then I seemed to be just inside the shaft of the mine, which I had never seen. Suddenly there was a roar and the roof collapsed. Then I awoke.

When Scruggs came to my house that morning to go to work I hid behind the door. I felt ashamed to face him because I was such a coward as to be afraid of a dream.

But that dream saved my life. Scruggs started working, and just as in my dream huge pieces of rock fell from the roof of the tunnel, killing him instantly. I would no doubt have been right beside him when this happened, as I had no experience as a miner and would have been watching him closely.

[FATE - 1955 March]

DATE.....Volume 8, Number 3, Issue Number 60
PAGE.....37

MONSTER OF VANCOUVER ISLAND

A SEA MONSTER with a horse-like head was reported by several residents of Nanaimo, British Columbia, on February 24, 1954. They said it appeared to be basking in the sun about 380 yards off the west coast of Vancouver Island between Parksville and Courtenay.

The monster was sighted again the following day. Five persons set out in a rowboat to photograph it. The creature submerged and when the party rowed toward the spot it surfaced and swam toward the boat. Its occupants rowed quickly back to shore.

W. Baldwin, of Errington, on Vancouver Island, said he watched the creature through field glasses. He described it as having a horse-like head and being about 40 feet long. At least 30 other persons viewed the creature, he said.

Book Reviews

Wood Knocks Vol 3 General Editor David Weatherly
ISBN 9781945950063 Leprechaun Press 2018

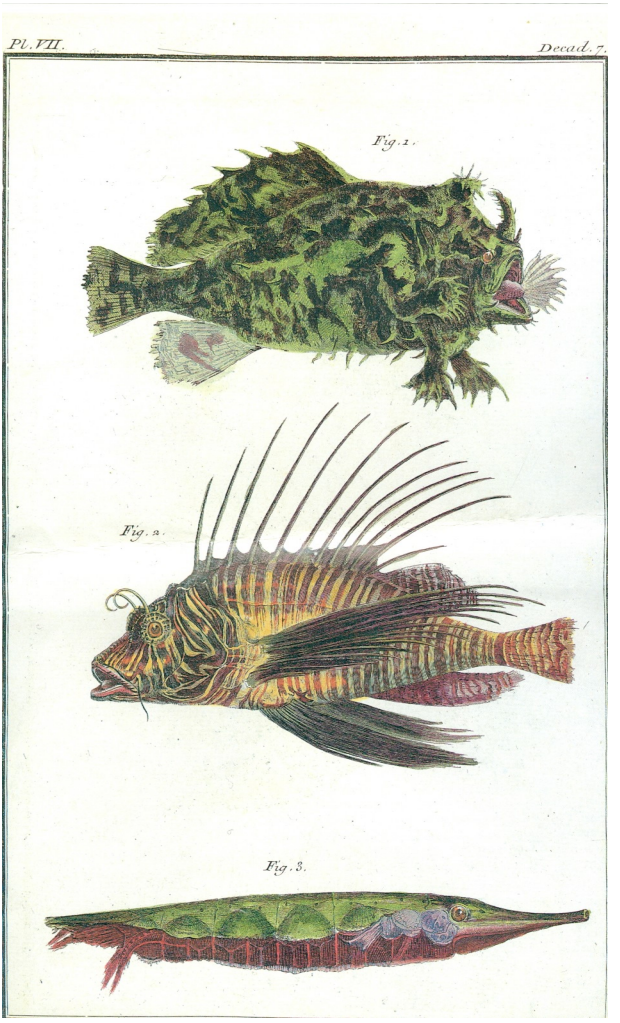
This is another excellent and exciting edition of Woodknocks (sub-titled `Journal of Sasquatch Research`) from David, comprising as its contents eight chapters as follows: `Bigfoot in Arizona` , by David himself, The Company They Keep by Timothy Renner which is a study of Bigfoot-type creatures and others in Pennsylvania, the following chapter is perhaps my favourite living in the U.K as I do, namely `The "Demon" Bigfoot of the U.K` by Nick Redfern. Not that I am a believer in the suggestion by some that the U.K has a resident population of Bigfoot type of creatures as there isn`t enough thick woodland, but hey,its good to keep an open mind. Nick expertly unravels the creepy mythology of the entities he describes, particularly a monster at Shugsborough Hall in Staffordshire, the word "Shug" being derived from an old word for demon. Chapter four is `The Florida Skunk Ape` by Robert Robinson Robinson explains that the first recorded sighting of a large hairy "ape-man" type phenomenon in Florida was in 1818 bringing the story right up to the second decade of the 21st century with a good bibliography. Chapter five by Bruce Champagne is ` An analysis of relict hominid sightings in the desert` and if that is too vague for you this refers to the desert regions of Utah, New Mexico, Nevada etc. This interested me as obviously Washington state in the north-west of

the U.S.A. is a more well documented area for Bigfoot or Sasquatch to be sighted. Chapter six by Joshua Cutchin is titled `The High Strangeness of Bigfoot`. David introduces this chapter thus: " Stone throwing, whistling and foul odors are only a couple of the things that fortean author Joshua Cutchin addresses in his contribution…" Cutchin makes the point that one key aspect of this "high strangeness" is poltergeist type activity. The final chapter is `Oklahoma`s Boggy Creek` by Marvin Leeper in which the author in a long essay taking a folklore approach to Bigfoot or allied mystery hominids drawing his material from Native American lore.

Altogether Wood Knocks vol 3 is a very worthy addition to any serious cryptozoologist`s collection and I look forwards to volume 4.

Some Things Strange and Sinister Terry Hooper-Scharf

Black Tower Books 2018 Here is another excellent book, very well illustrated, on many different matters, cryptozoology, (although I think Mr Hooper-Scharf does not describe himself as a cryptozoologist) Forteana and what could loosely be described as the paranormal - the first few chapters focus on extreme hauntings. I must admit I have a personal interest in this book as chapter 13 is titled Mystery Beasts of Ireland devoted to 3 cases of anomalous animals that I wrote about myself; my research being initially published many years ago in the Centre for Fortean Zoology`s magazine Animals and Men. Hooper-Scharf carefully and thoroughly researches each story in the book`s 32 chapters , he is no "soft-touch" ,he borders sometimes on the sceptical but to use his own words, " it may seem, when you read the accounts in the preceding chapters, that I am an out-and-out sceptic. I am *not."* (p.327) This statement is vindicated by the final chapter on `The Venezuelan Horror` ;a case of radiation poisoning of humans, but how did it happen? Other chapters focus on Spring Heeled Jack, USOs, Angel Hair and so on.



I bought a colour print at a market in Macclesfield during the Autumn of 2018, and on the back of it there is some text stating that the bottom fish was unknown at the time but Carl Marshall believes it is some kind of pipe fish. The print is titled `Moorish Idol and two other exotic fish." The lowest figure has so far refused to give up its identity but the central one may represent a goose scorpion fish, Rhinopias frondosa, another Indo-Pacific fish associated with coral reefs…" So says the text.